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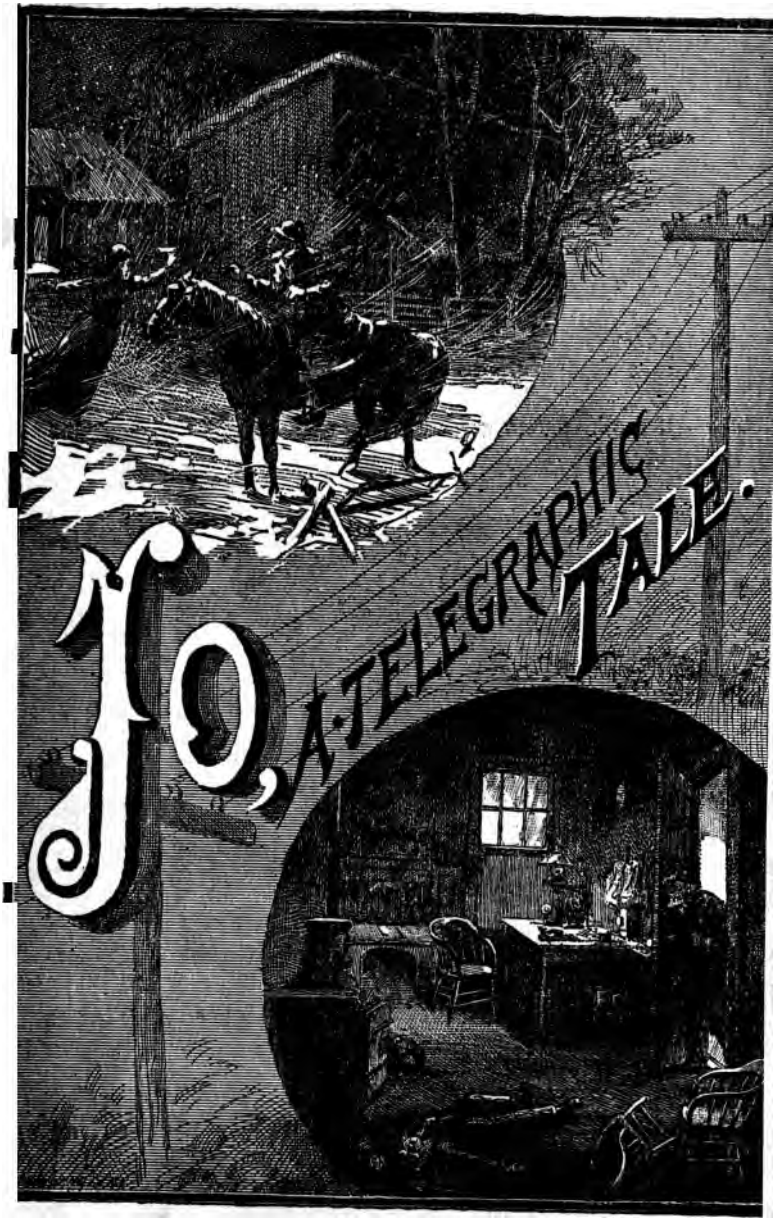
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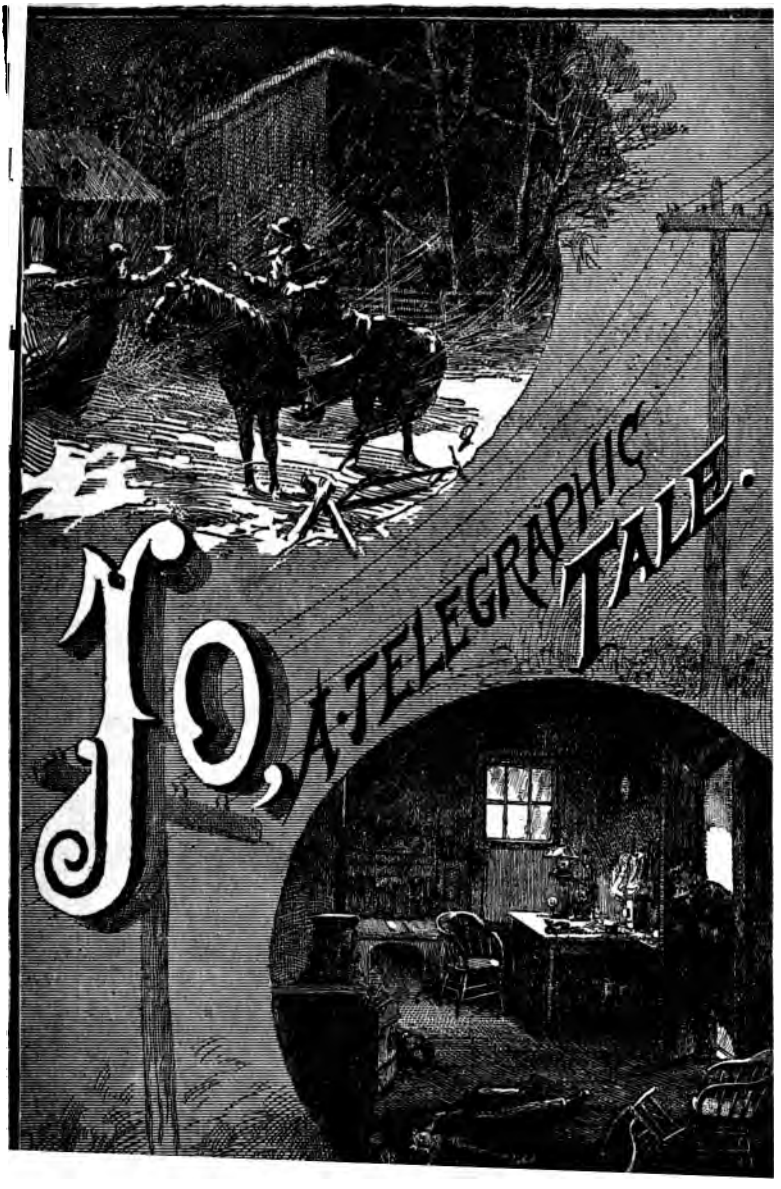
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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I. - - - - - - ARDREY DEPOT
II. - - - THE CIPHER MESSAGE
III. - - - - - - THE VISITORS
IV. - - - THE TRAMP OPERATOR
V. - - - A STARTLING DISCOVERY
VI. - - - - - - A CLOSE CALL
VII. - - - - - - - POOR TOM
VIII. - STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER
IX. - - - - - - A DEATH BLOW
X. - - - SAM AND HIS "PARDS"
XI. - - - - - - JO'S CONFESSION
XII. - - - THE LONE STAR STATE
XIII. - - - - THE DESERTED WIFE
XIV. - - - SIDE-TRACKED AGAIN
XV. - - - - SAM MAKES A HAUL
XVI. - - - - COLONEL JOHNSON
XVII. - - - - - - SAM'S LUCK
XVIII. - - - - WON AND LOST
XIX. - - - - - JO'S CHAMPION
XX. - - - - - ON THE TRAIL
XXI. - - - JACK SHOWS HIS HAND
XXII. - - - - - JO'S RETURN
XXIII. - - - - A VOICE FROM SAM
XXIV. - - - - - A NORTHER
XXV. - - - - - - ALL CLEAR

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IV. - - - THE TRAMP OPERATOR
V. - - - A STARTLING DISCOVERY
VI. - - - - - - A CLOSE CALL
VII. - - - - - - - POOR TOM
VIII. - STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER
IX. - - - - - - A DEATH BLOW
X. - - - SAM AND HIS "PARDS"
XI. - - - - - - JO'S CONFESSION
XII. - - - THE LONE STAR STATE
XIII. - - - - THE DESERTED WIFE
XIV. - - - SIDE-TRACKED AGAIN
XV. - - - - SAM MAKES A HAUL
XVI. - - - - COLONEL JOHNSON
XVII. - - - - - - SAM'S LUCK
XVIII. - - - - WON AND LOST
XIX. - - - - - JO'S CHAMPION
XX. - - - - - ON THE TRAIL
XXI. - - - JACK SHOWS HIS HAND
XXII. - - - - - JO'S RETURN
XXIII. - - - - A VOICE FROM SAM
XXIV. - - - - - A NORTHER
XXV. - - - - - - ALL CLEAR

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TO THE

RAIL AND WIRE MEN OF AMERICA,

IN WHOSE TRUSTWORTHY HANDS

THE LIVES AND FORTUNES OF MILLIONS

ARE UNHESITATINGLY CONFIDED,

THIS LITTLE VOLUME

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

As the following story was merely "dashed off" in an idle moment for the edification and amusement of a blind aunt on my grandmother's side and not intended for the critical gaze of a two-eyed public, such a thing as a preface was not thought of. Since, however, the aforesaid aunt suggests that it would be eminently proper to make a few preliminary remarks, I beg leave to say that this great and valuable "work" is given to the world with all the customary fear and trembling incident to maiden efforts. Though relating particularly to the telegraphic profession, the story is shorn of technicalities in order to render it acceptable to the general reader. If telegraphers or others find amusement or instruction in the following pages, one end will have been subserved, and if the book meets with a ready sale, the main object will have been accomplished.

THE AUTHOR.

PRESS OF
THE FORT WORTH PRINTING HOUSE, 312 HOUSTON STREET,
FORT WORTH, TEXAS.

CHAPTER I.

ARDREY DEPOT.

On a cold November morning in the year 187—, a mixed train of freight cars and passenger coaches ran into the village of Ardrey, in a Western State, and stopping at the little depot which did duty for both passengers and freight, a youth apparently seventeen years of age alighted, and entering the office, inquired for the agent. That functionary responding, the boy handed him a letter, which read as follows:

DARDEN, Nov. 24, 187—.

JAS. P. WARD, ESQ., Agent:

DEAR SIR—The bearer, Joseph H. Travis, has been appointed operator at your station and will assist you as clerk. You may place him on your station roll at fifty ($50) dollars per month.

Yours truly,

THOS. FARNHAM, Supt.

"So, young chap," remarked the agent, placing the letter in a pigeon-hole, "you are to be operator here, hey? Well, sit down and make yourself at home."

The lad removed his overcoat and going to the telegraph instrument, called up the general office

and informed the operator there of his safe arrival and asked if he had any instructions to give. "G. O." replied he had nothing then, and asked him how he liked the town and the agent. The lad answered he had not been able as yet to see the town and had not seen enough of the agent to form an opinion concerning him, but hoped he would like him.

"I hope so, too," responded "G. O.," "but he is not universally admired."

"Oh, we'll manage to get along, I think," said the boy, who then closed his key and drawing a chair up to the stove, seated himself. During the warming up process he observed the agent closely as he was looking over the way bills he had just received.

Jim Ward was an Englishman who had left his native land five years prior to the opening of this story. He had come direct to Darden, the headquarters of the railroad which ran through Ardrey, and had there obtained employment as a truckman at the depot; being promptly on hand at the required hour every morning, strictly temperate and possessing the accomplishment of good, plain penmanship, it was not long before his services were sought for in a more exalted sphere and he was, accordingly, promoted to the position of clerk, which office he filled with credit to himself and satisfaction to the company until the road reached Ardrey, when he was offered, and accepted, the agency at that place.

He was a middle-aged, short, heavy-set man, with bushy whiskers and moustache, and dull gray eyes which looked sleepily out through a pair of specta-

cles. There was nothing in his appearance to impress a stranger favorably or otherwise; he was common-place looking, and would never attract the slightest attention were it not for the odd aspect given his features by the spectacles. To know him half an hour was to be acquainted with him as far as was possible. He was insolent, arrogant, and equally as cringing and servile to those over him in authority as he was tyrannical to those who had the misfortune to be placed under him.

Joseph Travis, being affable in his manners, of a cheerful disposition and generous nature, felt he could never like the man, but determined to do what he could to make his surroundings pleasant. At noon the agent told him he was at liberty to go to dinner, and directed him to a tavern which stood about a quarter of a mile down the old stage road near the railroad track.

"You can probably get board there," said he; "they are full over at my place. Don't be longer than an hour—that's your time for dinner."

A brisk walk soon brought Jo to the door of the hostelry, which opened in obedience to his knock. He entered and found himself in a large but comfortable room, apparently used by the family as a sitting-room; an old-fashioned fireplace, with a generous log burning in it, gave a cheerful appearance to the apartment.

A gray-headed man, still, however, on the sunny side of fifty, drew a chair up to the fire, and saying, "Mornin', young man," motioned Jo to be seated.

The boy made known his mission at once, and after a few inquiries concerning his business in the village, the old gentleman told him he would speak to his wife, and left the room, but returned in a few minutes, saying everything was all right and dinner just ready.

Jo was then ushered into the dining-room and introduced to a pleasant-faced woman who sat alone at the table, with, "Well, wife, this is the youngster." He then took a seat indicated by the old man and proceeded to comply with his injunction to "pitch in."

"You look rather young to be away from home," remarked the old lady. "Do you live far?"

"About two thousand miles, I think," replied the lad.

"Two thousand miles!" she repeated in astonishment. "Where, then, are you from?"

"From Portland, Maine."

"The old man dropped his knife and fork, and leaning back in his chair, drew a long breath and said, slowly:

> "So you come from Portland, Maine,
> Out here your fortune to obtain!"

Jo looked in amazement at the old man, wondering if he was crazy. The old lady, evidently divining his thoughts, said: "Oh, you mustn't mind the Professor; rhyming is a gift of his. Have a little more butter, Mr.—— I declare, Professor, you haven't told me the young man's name."

"The young man's name I do not know."

"At home the folks all call me Jo," the boy responded, unintentionally rhyming the Professor's remark, a proceeding which greatly pleased the old couple and caused them to think very favorably of the strange youth.

The door at this moment opened and a bewitching little girl in the neighborhood of fifteen bounded gaily into the room, exclaiming: "Oh, papa! I—" and stopped suddenly, blushing deeply on seeing Jo.

"Come, Nettie," said the old lady, "don't be afraid of anybody; this is Mr.—— what *is* his name, Professor?"

"Jo," answered the Professor.

"Travis," said Jo.

"Ah, yes. Mr. Travis this is our daughter, Nettie. Now be seated, dear, right opposite Mr. Travis, where you can have a good look at him."

Poor Jo! When he commenced that meal he was as hungry as one generally becomes after traveling a week subsisting only upon what is obtainable at the railroad eating-houses; but though he had eaten very little, now that a mischievous face was opposite him, with its smiling mouth, blushing cheeks, slightly *retrousse* nose, and dark blue, laughing eyes, that Jo felt were looking at him from under their long lashes, his appetite departed and he wished he could depart with it. All attempts made by the Professor to draw him into conversation were futile, and when, after drinking his coffee and cramming his napkin into the cup, he made an effort to rise, his confusion was such that he upset

his chair and in endeavoring to right it fell sprawling on the floor.

The Professor arose and assisted to a perpendicular position the unfortunate boy, who, without even thanking the old man, retired in abject humiliation. His mortification was not lessened upon hearing a violent paroxysm of coughing behind him, which he rightly conjectured was caused by the efforts of Nettie to restrain her mirth. On reaching the open air he breathed freer and devoted the time consumed in his walk back to the depot in thinking what a fool he had made of himself.

Many years before the occurrence of the incidents just related, Jacob Matthews, a young man of twenty-five, found his way into this Western wild and opened a school in the log house built for that purpose by the settlers in the vicinity. Being a pleasant young fellow, making himself agreeable to the pupils in his charge and possessing what seemed to the unlettered settlers in that region an unbounded fund of knowledge, he was soon liked by all and ere long became the oracle of the surrounding country. In a few years he married the belle of the county and after a daughter had been born, built a tavern on the stage road and established himself therein as its proprietor.

His jovial, good-natured disposition, his hearty welcome to every one and his well-supplied table, soon gave his house a reputation for good cheer that many an older and more pretentious tavern never gained. The "Professor," as he was called from the

first day he entered the log school-house, was a kind-hearted, liberal man. No one was ever denied accommodations at his house on account of a lack of funds, while his well-filled purse was always open to the appeals of charity. A tender-hearted man where kindness was desired, his heart was as of iron when called upon to assist in the vindication of outraged law, and his wisdom, his courage, his abhorrence of anything criminal, and his fixed determination to rid the country of the desperate characters that then infested it, caused him to be called upon many a night to ride with a crowd bent upon paying its respects to some desperado.

When the shrill whistle of the locomotive announced the decadence of stage coaches in that section, Professor Matthews felt as though the greatest comfort of life had been taken from him. He had, however, become pretty comfortably fixed from the proceeds of the tavern, and though the advent of the railroad had curtailed his income in this particular, it had considerably more than made up the deficiency in enhancing the value of real estate he had purchased in anticipation of this event; he now, therefore, felt very well satisfied to settle down and cater to his own tastes rather than those of a traveling public. He was still often consulted by the old settlers on questions of moment and had a habit of speaking slowly on propositions submitted to him for consideration and judgment, and usually gave his opinion in a couplet.

Mrs. Matthews was a mild-tempered little woman,

who believed implicitly in her husband and thought whatever he said or did was perfectly right. Their daughter Nettie was a charming little creature, just budding into womanhood. Her father had taken her education in his own hands, and having taught her about all he knew, had resolved to send her to an Eastern seminary the next year.

After the boy's abrupt and unceremonious departure from the dining-room, Nettie, having no further occasion to restrain herself, burst into a merry peal of laughter over his mishap. Her mother gently remonstrated with her, saying that her appearance so unexpectedly had completely upset him.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Nettie. "Yes, it *upset* him, sure. But *isn't* he handsome? Who is he, papa?"

"Very likely a chap who never saw a girl before, judging by the way he tumbled over that chair, and just 'cause you looked at him. He's a manly looking fellow, though, and I'll warrant is a good, honest boy."

"Is he to board with us?" asked Nettie, very much interested.

"Yes; he said he expected to remain in Ardrey as long as he gave satisfaction to the company, and I guess he can stay with us as long as we give satisfaction to him. He is Mr. Ward's operator."

"Well," said Mrs. Matthews, "I hope for the boy's sake that the agent will take a fancy to him; otherwise, I fear he will have a hard time of it. I've heard that Mr. Ward was not an easy man to please,

and that he abused that little Parker boy shamefully."

> "If anything wrong is going about,
> Trust a woman to find it out,"

rhymed the Professor, laughing; then gravely: "Ward *is* a bad one; he is mean to everybody. But I tell you what: if he abuses *that* boy, I'll make him sorry for it. Poor fellow! he's two thousand miles from home, and no man will run over him while *I'm* around!" saying which, Mr. Matthews arose and left the room.

"Well, Nettie," remarked Mrs. Matthews after her husband had left, "your father has certainly taken a decided liking to the young man. I never heard him speak in such a manner of a total stranger before."

"I am sure he is very nice looking," said Nettie, thoughtfully.

"Your father is generally correct in his estimation of character, dear. I hope he is in this instance."

"Oh, I know he is," rejoined the girl, emphatically.

CHAPTER II.

THE CIPHER MESSAGE.

"You are back early," said Ward, as Jo entered the depot. "A new broom sweeps clean; now, I'll bet after you're here a week that gal of old Jake Matthews' will make you take two hours instead of a half at dinner."

"I'll not take any more than the regular time, Mr. Ward."

"Well, if you do, you'll interfere with my arrangements, and I won't stand that."

Jo turned to answer a call on the telegraph instrument and received a dispatch from Elk Falls, a station about fifty miles east of Ardrey, addressed to Professor Matthews, containing information that a party of six would be up on the 9 o'clock train that evening.

Glad of an opportunity to see the Professor so soon again, the boy started with the telegram down towards the tavern, resolving that he would try to erase the unfavorable impression the old man must have received at his awkwardness. He had proceeded but a short distance when he met Matthews and handed him the message, saying:

"I thought you would like it now, so I wouldn't wait till I came to supper."

"Thank you," said Matthews. "Yes," he added, after reading the telegram, "I like to know in time, though I s'pose we could accommodate them without any extra preparation. This is from my niece, and I'm glad they're coming. I was just going over into town, so if you're going to the depot I'll walk a piece with you."

They walked on slowly and in silence awhile, when the Professor, suddenly turning to the lad, asked:

"Mr. Travis, is your father living?"

"No, sir," replied Jo; "he died when I was about three years old. I don't remember him."

"Have you a mother?"

The lad looked up into the old man's face, and seeing there the kindly look his tone had indicated, answered:

"Yes, sir."

"Have you any relations out this way?"

"None that I know of."

"How came you in this country? You didn't run away, I hope?"

"No, sir; but my mother is poor and I could get only small wages East. I thought I could do better out here in that respect, and considered this a better country for a young man; but it's rather lonesome out here—not over a dozen houses in town, and nothing but a prairie to look at. I thought I had some ambition when I left home, but I guess I've

lost it, for I can't see how I'm to make a big fortune in this wilderness."

"Nonsense, my boy.

> A little ambition in every man lies,
> But he never knows what he can do till he tries.

You've started right; keep at it and some day that mother of yours will be mighty proud of you."

By this time they had reached the depot, and Jo invited his friend in. Ward went out in a few minutes and the Professor asked Jo what he thought of the agent.

The lad replied he had not formed a very exalted opinion of him, but thought he would get along all right.

"I hope you will," said Mr. Matthews. "I don't wish to discourage you at the start, but my notion is, there are many men you would like better. However, I hope you and I will be good friends, and at my house you must feel at home and our folks will call you 'Jo.'"

"Thank you, Mr. Matthews," was all the boy ventured to reply; for the good old man's kindness had really quite overcome him and he feared if he said anything further it might give rise to an outburst of emotion that would not look manly. The Professor left the depot shortly after this and Jo commenced a letter to his mother, but had written only a few lines when Ward returned.

"Say, young fellow," he blurted out, in a voice that gave Jo such a start his pen went clear through the paper on which he was writing, "we don't allow

any loafing in this shebang; the place for outsiders is *outside*. Please remember this in future."

"I did not know I was violating any rule in asking a friend in here," replied the boy, "or I would not have done so. I will not let it happen again."

"Well, see that you don't. I've no use for Jake Matthews, anyway. S'pose he came up here to make sure of his board bill."

"I am sure he didn't," warmly replied Jo. "I invited him here and he said nothing about board bill."

"He will soon enough; you can depend on that."

Jo felt the hot blood mantle his cheek and it was with difficulty he prevented himself giving a sharp retort. He knew, however, that it would be folly to open a breach so soon with Ward, as he would probably lose his place and be thrown on the world in a terribly strange land; he, therefore, said nothing further.

During the afternoon the agent called out:

"Come here, Travis, I'll show you where we bunk. We have to keep the operator handy at night in case he is wanted."

Opening a door leading out of the office, they entered a small room partitioned off the warehouse. "There," said Ward, pointing to a cot at the further side of the room, "you can sleep on that concern. I'd share my bed with you, but it is rather small and I don't like to be kicked."

The boy found the cot plentifully supplied with blankets, and thought he would sleep warm enough.

Ward's bed was a single affair and stood between the cot and the door. Near the latter a closet had been boxed off, the door of which was partially open. Jo glanced in, asking the agent at the same time if he could keep his clothes there.

"No," he replied, in a quick, sharp tone, springing forward and locking the closet door; "that's for my private use."

The glance that Jo gave in the closet, brief though it was, had been sufficient for him to see a pair of pistols and a dark-lantern lying on a shelf. The boy would have thought nothing of these things in themselves, as he would have supposed it necessary for the protection of the company's property that such articles should be kept around the depot; but the evident desire of the agent to prevent him seeing the contents of the closet, taken in connection with what he had seen, caused the lad to think that all was not right with Mr. Ward, though for the life of him he could not imagine what was wrong.

After a further inspection of the sleeping room, Jo followed Ward into the office and finished his letter.

When our young friend reached the tavern for supper he found the family just sitting down to the table.

"So you are here," said the Professor, cheerfully. "Was afraid you couldn't find us. By the way, your friend Ward looked rather black at me as I came out of the depot this afternoon. I don't think

my visit there was particularly agreeable to him; did he mention it?"

"Why, yes; that is, he gave me some information respecting outsiders, who were not to be allowed inside the office." Jo thought it best not to mention anything concerning the remarks made about the Professor by Ward.

"I know he don't like me, and I know why, but I'm not afraid of *him; he's* the one to look out." And the old man inclined his head and closed one eye significantly.

"Wife," he continued, "this young man and I have been talking over matters, and have concluded to be great friends. I am to be a sort of father to him—eh, Jo?"

"Yes, sir; that's the arrangement," replied Jo, stealing a look at Nettie, whom he imagined appeared considerably pleased; "but it is of course subject to Mrs. Matthews' approval."

That lady approved it, as she did every arrangement of her husband's and thought it very kind in him to thus take a poor, strange lad under his protection; and looking patronizingly at Jo, said she hoped he would always be sensible of the Professor's condescension.

"There is no man," she continued, "in this section of the country who can do as well by you, first and last, as the Professor; so you may consider yourself in very good hands."

Jo acknowledged the force of the old lady's remarks and looked upon Mr. Matthews as a tower

of strength. He was not, he said, oblivious to the fact that he would need advice and possibly protection.

"It is not often," remarked the old man, "that I take a sudden fancy to any one; but you," looking at Jo, "remind me so much of what I was when I left home that I naturally feel a sympathy, or, perhaps I should say, an interest in you; and remembering how much I needed a friend then, I know how much you need one now; but we will say no more about that at present. Now, wife, I have some news for you; I have a telegram from Sallie, saying six of them would be up to-night from the Falls."

"Why, Jake!" (Mrs. Matthews always called him Jake when surprised). "Why didn't you say something of this before? And that train will be here at 9 o'clock. But who are the six?"

"Mr. Lallady, you know, wrote that he and his wife would come up this week, and with Becky and Sallie, that'll make four."

"The other two are easy to find," said Nettie, "for Mr. Smoother is always with Aunt Becky; and I suppose his wealthy friend will come too."

"Quite right, Nettie. It takes the women folks to figure up cause and effect in certain instances. Now, I would never have argued that Smoother and his friend would be here because your Aunt Becky was."

"That's because you don't use your eyes, papa. Didn't you notice how much Mr. Smoother and Aunt

Becky were together the last time they were here?"

"I must confess I did not; but why should that bring Mr. Smoother's friend?"

"Oh, I don't know; may be he's in love with her too."

"Um! um! I can not think you used your eyes to very good advantage, Nettie, or you would not think that."

"I don't think," chimed in Jo, who was determined to say something and had been watching a favorable opportunity, "I don't think that Miss Nettie should be allowed to use her eyes in any other manner than to advantage."

"Why?" asked the Professor.

"Because they are so beautiful," replied Jo, turning as red as a boiled lobster and wriggling in his chair.

Nettie blushed and hung her head. She would have been glad if he had thought her eyes beautiful, but somehow it seemed to her that the tone of his voice was too flippant to be sincere.

The Professor laughed, and remarking that beautiful eyes were generally used by their owners to the disadvantage of others, he and the boy arose from the table and passed out into the sitting-room.

"I suppose you will sleep at the depot?" asked the Professor.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Ward says they keep the operator there in case of emergency. I'm afraid, though, it will make me late to breakfast."

"We breakfast early—generally about sun-up;

but that makes no difference, as it can be kept warm. Believe I'll walk up to the depot with you. I've got to go over to the postoffice, then I'll come back and stay till the train arrives."

On reaching the station it was ascertained that the train was three hours late, whereupon the Professor told Jo that he wouldn't wait up for it; those people knew the way to his house, anyhow. And bidding him good-night, the old fellow went over into "town."

When Jo was about to "cut out" for the night, Ward approached him and asked if Matthews had said who were expected on the train.

"Yes, sir," the boy answered. "He told Mrs. Matthews that her sister would be here with a married couple, but I forget the name."

"Was that all?"

"No, sir; he said somebody by the name of Smoother would be along also."

"Smoother, hey? And the message was from his niece, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"That settles it, *he'll* be here. Now, hold on a bit; I want you to send a message for me."

Jo took his seat and waited patiently, and in about ten minutes the agent handed him a blank on which was written a message addressed:

"To Carter, Spankton."

The lad called "S.K.," the signal for Spankton, and was gratified at being answered promptly. He sent the message, filed it, and cutting out his instru-

ments, prepared to retire. Then pausing, he thought of the message he had just sent. "Wonder what it means," he thought. "I'll have another look at it."

The telegram was an apparently meaningless one, consisting of words which had the appearance of having been picked up and thrown together promiscuously; it read as follows:

ARDREY, 11-25.

CARTER, Spankton:

Off ten Dick come work here night and to be tomorrow ready thousand will down get. WARD.

Jo knew this to be a "cipher" message and supposed, of course, that Ward had put it in this shape in order that no one on the line would understand it. This was sufficient in itself to excite the boy's curiosity, and he determined to decipher it if possible.

As the agent remained in the office, Jo had no opportunity to attempt the solution of the riddle, therefore he retired shortly after nine. Though wearied with an almost continuous week's ride, it was no easy matter for him to sleep. He lay and tossed on his cot, trying every method he could think of to bring sleep to him, but the utmost he could get was an occasional doze, from which he would awake with a start. The cipher message seemed to present itself to him in every conceivable shape but the right one, and the only words in it that appeared at all connected, "Dick, come work here," were constantly running with a hideous jingle

through his head. Once, dreaming that Ward was carrying Nettie Matthews off on a powerful horse, he cried aloud: "Dick, come!" just as the agent entered the room.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Nightmare?"

"Yes, I believe so," replied Jo.

"You must be tired from your long ride; I should think you would sleep soundly."

"Everything is so new, I can't compose myself; but I will get asleep good after awhile."

"Oh, yes," rejoined Ward; "and you can sleep as late as you like in the morning."

The boy thought this very kind, and was about to so express himself when the agent asked:

"How do you like your boarding-house?"

"First-rate. I like the whole family, too. Mr. Matthews is a good man."

"May be he is. Did he say much about me to-day?"

"Not a great deal, though of course we spoke of you."

"His remarks were not very complimentary, eh?"

"I can't say that he said anything particularly bad about you." And Jo yawned and turned over on his cot as a hint that he desired no further conversation. Ward muttered something unintelligible to Jo and soon after went to bed.

As the boy lay there endeavoring to sleep, the remark of the Professor at the supper table that Ward was "the one to look out," occurred to him; he considered this to have been full of meaning and

thought that Mr. Matthews possibly had some information which might be used to the agent's disadvantage. He then concluded that Ward had been trying to "pump" him as to the extent of the Professor's information and forthwith resolved to keep a close mouth. Feeling somewhat easier by reason of having solved a part of the mystery, Jo made one determined effort and sailed away into the land of dreams.

CHAPTER III.

THE VISITORS.

Jo was permitted to sleep undisturbed until eight o'clock the next morning and in consequence was late at the breakfast table. He felt disappointed at not seeing Nettie's bright face there, but consoled himself with the reflection that it was not long until dinner, when he would surely have the pleasure of meeting her again.

Mrs. Matthews was at the table with her sister, Miss Becky Stubbs, a lady of about any age from twenty-five to forty, with a peaked face and long nose. She wore corkscrew curls, large half-moon earrings and a breastpin containing the picture of some gentleman as old-fashioned as herself.

Jo learned that the party had arrived about midnight and that the Professor had met them at the depot, notwithstanding the fact that the road to his house was well known to them.

"And to think," said Miss Stubbs, "of that poor, dear man waiting up in the cold for us. But it was not our fault, Mr. Travis; the engine had busted its eccentricity, and we laid on that track three mortal hours without moving a peg!"

"It must have been very tiresome, ma'm," ventured Jo.

"Tiresome? I rayther think it was; and if Mr. Smoother had not allowed me to lean my head on his shoulder——"

Miss Becky stopped, coughed and turned frightfully red, but realizing the importance of saying something, continued:

"I mean on the back of the seat; if he hadn't done that, I would have had a terrible heartache—I—I mean headache."

"The back of the seat is not a very comfortable pillow," suggested Jo, smiling at the old maid's confusion.

"Well, sir," she retorted, "I liked it well enough."

After Jo's departure she expressed her opinion of "that little upstart," as she called him. "The idea of his coming out here to make fun of people—he had better go home!"

"But, Becky," said her sister, "I am sure you gave him cause for laughing; you said you leaned your head——"

"I didn't mean that; it was a mistake; can't one make mistakes, I'd like to know? Don't you, sometimes? Not that Mr. Smoother isn't nice and so on, but it wouldn't be proper to do that and the little upstart might have known I didn't mean it."

When Jo entered the office he heard the operator at Spankton, the terminus of the road, calling him vociferously. He answered and was the recipient of a little telegraphic abuse for not being on hand

promptly; not relishing this, he replied with considerable warmth:

"Oh, don't eat me!" Spankton exclaimed:

"Don't be alarmed," replied Jo, "I am not fond of pork."

A mysterious "Ha!" by some appreciative operator down the line smoothed Jo's ruffles, but served to anger the Spankton man, who started in with a long message at a lively gait. Travis took it all without a "break," and his "O. K." at the end elicited a "good nuff" from some operator who probably was pleased at Spankton's discomfiture.

Handing the dispatch to Mr. Ward, to whom it was addressed, Jo asked if he was acquainted with the operator at Spankton.

"Oh, yes," was the reply, "I know him very well; his name is Carter. Why?"

"O-ho," thought the lad; "that's the man the cipher message was for." Then aloud: "Nothing, only he seems rather savage on the line; I suppose, though, he's like a great many other operators—abusive over the wire, but friendly enough personally."

"I don't know about that," said Ward; "my opinion of Pete Carter is that he's the same off as on the line. I think he's a pretty good fellow, but let me tell you, youngster, he'll not stand any trifling."

Ward uttered this remark so significantly and accompanied it with such a sharp look, that Jo nervously glanced out the window, half expecting to

see the subject of their conversation marching down the track with a big club over his shoulder. He had the satisfaction, however, of hearing Carter just then send a message to some other office. There was a peculiar "clip" in Carter's sending that Jo had never observed in any other operator, and which made it easy for him to recognize at once

It is well known in the fraternity that after becoming familiar with an operator's "sending," it is as easily recognized and distinguished from others as is a familiar voice; in this case, however, it was only necessary to hear Carter's peculiar formation of characters once or twice, to be able to tell with certainty when he was at the key.

The forenoon wore away without any further incident, and at noon Jo proceeded to the tavern, where he found the family and the party from Elk Falls already seated at the dinner table. The Professor, in his slow and impressive manner, always equal to the dignity of the occasion, submitted him to the unpleasant ordeal of an individua lintroduction to the new-comers.

"Mr. and Mrs. Lallady, this is Mr. Travis—Miss Garnet, Mr. Travis—Mr. Buskin and Mr. Smoother, Mr. Travis; Miss Stubbs, I believe you met this morning. Now, folks, we are all acquainted and will proceed to business."

During the introduction Jo was kept standing up, busy nodding to first one and then the other as the Professor's open hand would indicate which one he was at that moment introducing him to.

All bowed pleasantly to the boy, and Mr. Smoother, when his name was called, rose up, and reaching a long arm across the table over Miss Garnet's head, grasped Jo's small hand in his large palm and gave it a squeeze that caused the lad to squirm.

"Glad to see you," said he, his mouth full of bread.

Jo noticed that he was a tall, slim, countryfied-looking man, whose shoulders were rather suggestive of large, sharp bones, and not at all adapted to the comfort of a lady's head.

Mr. Smoother had formerly been a Methodist preacher, but having realized quite a sum on an investment in real estate, had left his flock to look out for their own souls, while he watched the interests of his own pocket.

Mr. and Mrs. Lallady were an elderly couple, and frequent visitors at the Professor's. They had raised quite a number of children, all of whom had married and left them; and now, having nothing particular to keep them at home, were passing the remainder of their lives in visiting relatives and friends. They were quite wealthy, and being easy to please, generally received a welcome wherever they went.

Mr. Buskin was a fine-looking young man, tall, straight as an arrow, with coal-black hair, and eyes of the same color; his features were handsome, and his smile disclosed a rare set of even, white teeth; his manners were easy, graceful and affable, treating all alike with the utmost consideration. He dressed with neatness and taste, and wore a diamond cluster

ring on the little finger of his left hand, while a modest solitaire sparkled brilliantly from his white shirt front. He had been in the State but a few months, having come from New York for the purpose, he said, of examining into the resources of the country and investing largely in land. This was his second visit to the Professor's house, and though everything indicated the well-bred, polished gentleman, the old man had not taken kindly to him, but had extended the hospitalities of his home through courtesy to his old friend Smoother, who had introduced him.

Mr. Matthews contended that when a man assumed a character different from his own, something about him would indicate his true position. He, however, could detect nothing in Richard Buskin that did not accord with what he represented himself, with the single exception of a habit he had of twirling his black moustache with his left hand. This, the Professor thought, was done to exhibit the diamond ring, and was an evidence of a weakness somewhere.

Sallie Garnet, a gushing miss of eighteen or nineteen, a niece of Mrs. Matthews, was the life of the company. Having often visited her aunt, and being always petted by that lady and her husband, she of course felt quite at home. Conversation never flagged while she was around, and her incessant talking at the dinner table rendered it almost impossible for others to get a word in edgewise. She was passably handsome, having large, lustrous black eyes and a finely shaped chin; her mouth,

however, was not very small, and spoiled what would otherwise have been a beautiful face.

Jo was not favorably impressed with any of the new arrivals, and was heartily glad when the meal was finished. Though he had not been able to say as much as one word to Nettie, he had caught her looking at him several times, and he felt tolerably well satisfied, especially as he possessed enough conceit to imagine she was looking upon him in admiration.

At the tea table matters were a little more satisfactory to all, as Sallie lost her breath occasionally (if such thing is possible with this class), or else she had a little consideration for others. At all events, though she led the conversation, the rest of the party had their share in it.

When the meal was nearly finished, she fixed her black eyes on Jo and broke out with:

"Mr. Travis, did you ever love a girl so much that you would sit up till daylight composing poetry to send her, and manufacture something like this:

> "The earth might some day cease to roll,
> The sun itself forget to shine;
> But everlasting, ever true,
> Is this distracting love of mine?"

And Sallie crossed her hands on her breast and rolled her eyes toward the ceiling.

All, excepting Miss Stubbs and Mr. Smoother, laughed heartily. The former looked stiff and dignified, while the latter made a ghastly attempt to

join in the laugh, but soon concluded it was a miserable failure and abandoned it.

"I never wrote poetry in my life, Miss Garnet," said Jo, when the merriment had subsided.

"Indeed! Then you were never in love; there's not a doubt of that, for one goes with the other. But perhaps you mean you never wrote in verse; you may have employed prose. Now, did you never tell a girl that if she was as far away as the sun a spark from her eye would kindle the fire of love in your heart?"

"I never did," replied the boy, laughing, "but there's no telling how far my imagination would take me if I fell into that condition."

"I don't think," said Nettie, "that it would cause you to make such absurd declarations; that's quite too long a distance for the spark of an eye or anything else to be appreciated."

"That would depend upon whose eye it was, Miss Nettie," he returned, looking full in hers.

She blushed, looked down and said nothing; soon, however, meekly raising her head and looking at her father, she asked:

"Papa, how far is it to the sun, anyway?"

The old gentleman straightened up, cleared his throat and drew a long breath—all knew what was coming—then slowly answered:

> "The sun that rules our earth by day
> Is ninety-two millions of miles away."

"Oh, *don't*, Uncle!" cried Sallie. "Do tell the child how far it is without grinding out a rhyme.

It's ninety-two millions, Nettie; that's a good distance for love to manifest itself." And she stole a look at Mr. Smoother, who was blushing behind his ears.

"Why, Sallie!" exclaimed her aunt, "how you do act. Mr. Smoother, don't you think she is horrid?"

"Oh, Mr. Smoother don't mind that," said Sallie. "I dare say he never made love to anybody."

"As to that, Miss Sallie," replied Smoother, who had recovered his composure, "it would depend upon what would constitute the act of making love. I have taken moonlight strolls with the fair sex, eulogized the moon, and so forth, but do not remember to ever having been betrayed into squeezing a female hand; and although I may have indited to one a verse or two of sentimental nonsense, it was only caused by my desire to air an accomplishment I foolishly imagined I possessed."

"I am sure I think you possess it in a marked degree," said Sallie.

Mr. Smoother bowed.

"Look here, Smoother," said the Professor, good-naturedly, "have you been writing verses to my niece?"

"To *me!*" exclaimed Sallie. "Gracious! no, indeed—*I* was not the person so favored." And she turned a little to observe her Aunt Becky, who was stiffer and more dignified than ever.

The Professor saw it all now, but not wishing to

be a party to Sallie's mischief, turned the conversation.

Miss Garnet was quiet after this, as the gentlemen of the party talked of nothing but the brilliant future in store for that section of the country. This topic was not an interesting one to her, but it was noticed that when Mr. Buskin expatiated upon the fertility of the soil, the beauty of the scenery and the invigorating qualities of the climate she was an attentive listener.

"Yes, gentlemen," Mr. Buskin remarked, seeing Sallie's eyes beaming upon him, "this is a great, glorious country, and that I have faith in its rapid advancement is proved by my investing so largely here."

"Handsome and wealthy," thought Sallie. "He is a man I could love."

After supper Mr. Buskin said he would accompany Jo to the depot, and the two left the house together. During the conversation that took place on the way, Jo's companion mentioned having been at Spankton, whereupon the lad asked him if he had ever met Mr. Carter, the operator there.

"Oh, yes," he replied, "I know Carter very well; he is much of a gentleman. You would like him if you were to meet him."

Jo differed with him in this respect, but kept it to himself.

"Carter is rather old," continued Buskin, "but his wits are young and healthy. How do you like my friend Ward, the agent here?"

"Oh, we get along very well."

"A man must know Ward to appreciate him; he's a capital fellow in his way."

Jo would have accepted Mr. Buskin's praise of Carter as partly true, at least, but when his commendation included Ward, whom Jo knew to be anything but a "capital fellow," he concluded that the gentleman's standard of good fellowship was on a low plane. He accordingly conceived a decided dislike to this Mr. Buskin, whom he had been told was an Eastern capitalist.

When they entered the depot Mr. Buskin shook hands familiarly with Ward, and the boy soon learned that the capitalist was not to be considered an outsider. He made himself perfectly at home in the office, and laughed and chatted with the agent up to ten o'clock, at which time they both left the depot.

Jo then went into the bed-room, and just as he threw himself on the cot the pair came back. He then dropped into a light sleep, from which he was awakened by the whistle of a locomotive, and the eleven o'clock train from Spankton thundered up to the depot. He heard greetings exchanged, and after the train passed on several persons came into the office. He could distinguish the voices of Ward and Buskin, mingled with that of a stranger, in animated conversation; but though he could catch a word now and then, he could not connect anything he heard.

Finally the strange voice shouted, with an oath:

"You've sent for me; now get to business, for I can't stay long."

The door of the bed-room was immediately opened and Ward entered with a lantern; he cast a glance at the boy on the cot, who was apparently fast asleep; then unlocking the closet, he fumbled in it a few moments, then locked it again, and returning to the office, closed the door behind him. In a short time Jo heard the party leave the depot and all was quiet.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAMP OPERATOR.

Jim Ward was in a good humor the next morning, though Jo suspected he had not had a wink of sleep. True, the single bed had been disturbed, but it might have been done to mislead him.

Old Nathan, the negro porter, who divided his time between the depot and tavern, came in while Jo was at his toilet.

"Goo' mawnin', boss," said he. "This is boot-black mawnin', yer know—allers blacks boots three times a week, countin' Sundays; sometimes I blacks 'em of 'ner, but I git paid extra for it."

"All right, Nathan," said Jo; "black mine when they need it, no matter what morning it is, and I'll pay you."

"Dat's bisness, boss; shine 'em all day if yer pay for it. Yah! yah!"

"You seem in a merry mood this morning, Nathan; hope you haven't been drinking?"

"Laws me!" said Nathan, holding up a boot he had on his left hand and eyeing it critically. "Now

who'd a thought this boy would ever say that to such an ole man—ole enuf to be his fadder?"

"Yes, or grandfather, Nathan. Perhaps I was mistaken; you wouldn't drink, of course."

"Mister Jo, lis'en here!" and the old darkey raised the blacking brush and shook it at the boy to give emphasis to his words. "For free years I was a Gospel preacher, and for two years a-follerin' dat up to now I'se been a Christian gem'l'man, an' I ain't drunk a drop in all dat time."

"I'm glad to hear it," replied Jo; "stick to it. You'll have hard work cleaning those boots," he added, as the old darkey took up a pair covered with mud; "the man who wore them must have slid down a clay-bank."

"Dem's Mars' Ward's. S'pose he was out agin last night; he's allers rattin' around. Dey ain't no clay dis side o' de branch, an' I doan' see wha' he'd go down dar fur; but nearly ev'ry boot-black mawnin' I see dese yere boots in de same fix."

"May be he was hunting," suggested Jo.

"Now, Mis'r Jo, you know dat man ain't been huntin' since yo' been yer', an' I know he got dat mud las' night. 'Cos w'y? Hit ain't dry yet. Lemme tell yer, boss, dar's dat lightnin' man from Spankton come on las' night's train, an' dat sharp-eyed man from de Falls dat come up night fo' las'. I seed 'em go 'way arter de train pulled out, an' dey wen' down to'rds de branch. I don' know what dey went fur, but I don' reckon dey was up to any good."

And the old negro shook his head solemnly and scraped the boot with the tin blacking-box cover.

"How far is it to the branch from here?" asked Jo.

"Not mo' dan two miles, but you'd have to go a mile furder up fo' you struck de soft clay."

Jo had a good deal to think of on his way to and from breakfast that morning. It was now clear that the stranger who came on the eleven o'clock train the previous night was Carter, and his voice that said: "You've sent for me, now get to business." He had evidently come in obedience to the cipher message, and that message had been sent directly after Jo had given Ward certain information concerning the party from Elk Falls. The agent's remark at the time: "That settles it, *he'll* be here," without a doubt referred to Buskin, therefore it was easy to see that Ward, Buskin and Carter were partners in something that would not allow daylight to fall upon it.

"Now," thought Jo, "as I have figured out this much, I may be able to translate the message. I'll try it again to-day."

During the forenoon Ward went into the bed-room, and as the boy supposed he would take a nap, he applied himself to the task of deciphering the telegram. He arranged the words in several diffrent positions, and finally hit the right one, which appeared very simple. There were sixteen words in the message, and by writing them four in a line, forming four columns, then commencing at the last word, reading up that column, and so on with each,

commencing at the bottom word, the message was clear, thus:

Off	ten	Dick	come
work	here	night	and
to	be	to-morrow	ready
thousand	will	down	get

"Good!" exclaimed Jo, and hurriedly starting to his feet, his head hit Ward, who was peering over his shoulder, square on the nose.

"Confound you!" said the agent, clasping the injured organ in his left hand, while he raised the right threateningly, "what are you about?"

Jo slipped around to the end of the table, out of reach, and leaning over, picked up the papers he had been using in deciphering the telegram. Ward made an effort to take them out of his hand, but the boy was too quick.

"Travis, what are those papers?"

"They are of a private nature, Mr. Ward, and I prefer to keep them."

At this moment a man presented himself at the counter which separated the waiting-room from the office, and looking at Jo, jerked his head back and winked his left eye, at the same time saying:

"Come here minute, Jim."

The lad went to ascertain what was wanted and was handed a folded counter blank by the gentleman on the outside. Opening it, he found written in a neat, round hand:

"Can't you stake me to a dollar? Am half famished. SAM SIMPSON, Opr."

Mr. Simpson would have passed for a very good looking man if he had been washed up a little and the two weeks' growth of beard removed from his face, and had his clothing been in a little better condition. He wore a threadbare frock coat, suggestively buttoned close to the chin; the sleeves were greasy and shiny from the elbows down to his red hands, which they almost covered; his dilapidated hat had lost nearly all its rim, and was now in a fair way to lose its crown. He was probably about thirty years of age, though his bloodshot eyes and bloated countenance made him look ten years older, and told a tale of intemperance that was quickly read, even by inexperienced Jo.

"You say you are an operator? Where did you work last," asked the boy.

"You bet. Old time rocks. Worked in Chicago last spring; worked second New York. Signed X."

"Haven't you done anything since then?"

"Yes, railroaded it a while; did the circular work on a freight; you understand? Head wheelman, eh?"

"You want a situation, don't you?"

"Don't I? Wouldn't the tattered condition of my raiment suggest that idea?" and he turned around slowly, that Jo might see he was sadly in need of repairs.

"Well, come in here; maybe I can fix you up a

little," and Jo went to the door and held it open while Simpson entered the office.

Going into the bed-room, Travis selected from his own small stock a shirt, collar, and a hat, which he turned over to Simpson, saying:

"You may have these things if you can wear 'em, but they may be rather small."

"Oh, I guess not," was the reply; "I've got an accommodation neck, and can wear all sizes."

"Now," said Jo, after the operator had transferred the shirt to his own back, and had assumed a little more respectable appearance, "you come around at twelve and I'll take you down to dinner."

"Dinner? Oh, I'll be here. Haven't chewed for so long I don't know if my teeth can stand it. But say, old pard, couldn't you give me a half to brace up on? I feel kinder cool," he said, shivering and hugging himself, "and need something to warm me up."

Jo handed fifty cents to Sam, who thanked him and left the depot.

At twelve o'clock, Simpson not making his appearance, Jo concluded to go over into town and look for him. As he approached the principal street he saw a crowd collected on one of its corners, and was somewhat surprised to see there his new acquaintance, in an inebriated condition, regaling the bystanders with quotations from Shakespeare. Seeing Jo, he yelled out:

"Come on, old pard; glad to see you. Come in and take something."

Travis declined the invitation, and as Simpson walked into the saloon he proceeded on his way to dinner alone.

After dinner, Mr. and Mrs. Lallady and Mr. Buskin accompanied Jo back to the station and took the two o'clock train for Elk Falls; the rest of the party remained at the tavern. Smoother was to return home the following week, and Miss Stubbs and Sallie Garnet were to stay until after the holidays.

Sam Simpson proved to be an agreeable sort of a fellow, though his fondness for liquor barely gave him time to attend to anything but finding means of satisfying his craving for it. He had put in an application for a situation on the road, and being a quasi-railroad man and an entertaining talker, Ward offered no objection to his coming in the office.

Jo delighted to listen to his tales of "old timers in the biz," which he was always fond of relating, and as many of his yarns detailed his own escapades, it is fair to presume that he considered himself one of the oldest.

One morning Jo told Sam that the operator at Elk Falls was feeling badly, and if he didn't get better soon, would take a lay-off.

"May the fates be propitious for once," said Sam, "and make him worse. Not that I want the poor fellow to get sick, or die, or anything of that sort, but I'd like him to take a good rest so we might both be benefited. Eh? Loafing's a disagreeable job, Jim, 'specially when a feller's credit's gone."

"Why, Sam, you are not in want of anything to eat?"

"Hang it, no. I'm solid for grub, but a little budge now and then wouldn't go bad."

"If you thought less of drink you'd be better off."

"O, yes," growled Sam, "now *you* have to commence. I've heard that from Maine to California; but I tell you, young feller, when a man has had whisky for a side pard ten or twelve years it's no easy matter to give it the shake."

"I suppose so," responded Travis, "but it appears to me if you would try to think of something besides your drinks, that subject would soon cease to be the leading one and would finally leave you entirely."

"Well, I'll try it some time—but honest, Jo, I feel sorter nervous-like this morning and ought to have something to tone me up. Couldn't let a feller have a quarter, could you, eh?"

"Not for drink, Sam."

"All right. I'll go over to town, and may be I can strike some one. If that man at the Falls wants relief, remember I'm on deck."

"Yes, I'll remember you. But say, how would you like to work for me to-morrow?" asked Jo, as a thought struck him.

"I'll do it if you want to go off. Going down the road?"

"No, just want to take a hunt. Come around this afternoon and I'll let you know."

"All right," replied Sam, and struck out for a drink.

Jo and the Professor agreed on a hunt up the branch for the next day. The old man said he would have everything in readiness, and it was arranged that the lad should sleep at the tavern in order that an early start might be made and no time lost. Simpson consented to run the office until closing time that night so that there would be no necessity for Jo to go back to the depot after supper.

Though our young friend had now been in Ardrey over a week, an opportunity to spend the evening at the tavern had not yet presented itself, as his duties required him at the office from seven until nine, and sometimes later; therefore his expectations for the evening were at a high pitch.

The evening meal was discussed almost in silence, for Miss Sallie's volubility did not make itself apparent. Something had evidently occurred to depress that young lady's spirits.

After the meal was finished, the whole family, with Mr. Smoother and Jo, entered the cosy sitting-room. Old Nathan brought in a huge log which he placed on the fire, and soon the crackling and roaring of the flames, added to the ruddy glow, gave the room a bright, cheerful appearance that is never seen where fireplaces are lacking.

"I hear you are going hunting to-morrow," Nettie said to Jo, after they had seated themselves in a corner.

"Yes," he replied, "but I think I could find more interesting game by staying here."

"Thank you, sir, if you mean me, though I had no idea I could be classed under that head, Mr. Travis."

"Miss Nettie," said Jo, gravely, "do you realize the fact that I am nearly two thousand miles from home?"

"I do," wonderingly.

"And that to be made to feel every few minutes that I *am* far away from home and kindred is rather disagreeable?"

"Why, certainly. What do you mean?"

"Simply that I am unpleasantly reminded of my position every time I am called 'Mr. Travis.' Now, don't you think it hard? Three weeks ago I was 'Jo.' To-day I'm *mistered* by everybody."

"Yes; but mamma says one has to be very careful of strangers and should not get too intimate on short acquaintance."

"Your mother is quite right; but I am young and could not have attained any great proficiency in the art of deception. I once heard Uncle Dave tell mother that my heart could be read through my face. Look now, and see if you can tell whether I am honest or not."

Nettie looked into the boy's frank, manly face and agreed with his uncle.

"I think you are a good boy," she said, "and—and a nice one, too; but it will be hard to say 'Jo' when every one else says 'Mr. Travis.'"

"Your father will set you the example."

"Well, Mr.——"

"No, no," he interrupted; "try that over again."

"Well—*Jo*—I think we better get nearer the fire."

"Just a minute. As you have agreed to call me 'Jo,' I'd like to do something for you in return. What shall it be?"

"Nothing at all. I don't——"

"But I must insist; so I'll call you Nettie—how'll that do? That's only fair."

Nettie blushed and exclaimed:

"Oh, Mr. Travis!"

"Now, now, that *won't* do; say 'Oh, Jo!'"

"Oh, Jo," she repeated in such a bewitching, captivating manner that Jo was sorely tempted to kiss her before them all.

Thus did the happy moments fly for the young couple, and when the Professor announced the hour for retiring had arrived they were loth to believe him, so quickly had the time passed. All the family, even Aunt Becky, had addressed the boy as 'Jo,' and he now in reality began to feel himself at home.

After good-nights had been exchanged all around, the lad was shown up-stairs by the Professor, and when he lay himself upon the bed that the old man had instructed him to "pile into," he felt that he had never in his life passed such a delightful evening or one that promised more for the future.

CHAPTER V.

A DISCOVERY.

Long before daylight had made its appearance e Professor knocked at Jo's door. The lad sponded with alacrity, and before the sun had ted the eastern horizon with its cheering rays the nters had reached a hill which gently sloped ward Beaver Creek. Standing on this eminence, e could see a vast, undulating prairie lying to the st and south, while to the north stretched the ek in its sinuous windings until it entered a forest d was there lost to view. To the east lay the little lage of Ardrey, beyond which the gray dawn was st appearing. Over all the barren desolation of nter had settled, imparting to the scene a dreariss that was heightened in its effect by the early orn and overcast sky.

The hunters were soon at the creek, which they llowed in the direction of the forest.

Jo was in fine spirits, caused, primarily, by the ought of the point he had gained with Nettie the evious evening, and assisted by the cool, bracing r that blew against him as he trudged along by e side of the Professor. He opened his mouth

and was about to make an effort at singing, when his companion, with a "Sh!" clutched his arm and drew him down behind the low bank. There they both crouched, breathless. Presently a heavy tread was heard upon the ground, and Jim Ward, the railroad agent, passed within a few feet of them. His hands were thrust in his overcoat pockets, his eyes cast on the ground, while a fierce, sullen expression rested upon his ever-scowling face. The Professor and Jo said nothing until Ward was some distance away; then rising, and keeping along the bed of the creek, they resumed their course.

"He's been out all night, I suppose," remarked Jo. "There's a good sized bug under the chip."

"Yes," replied the old man, "and the chip don't begin to cover it. We'll have an explanation of this before long, depend upon it."

The two proceeded in silence until they came to the edge of the forest. Here the banks of the creek widened considerably for some distance, then, converging, formed a small lake, in the center of which floated a covey of ducks. The Professor motioned the boy to be quiet, and they crept noiselessly forward, keeping well covered by the brush, to obtain a more favorable position for a shot.

Suddenly the sharp crack of a rifle rang clearly out on the morning stillness; the ducks, rising, flew to the south. Another, and yet another shot whizzed after them, and directly a man made his appearance from behind a "blind" at the northwest side of the lake. Shading his eyes with his hand, he eagerly

scanned the surface of the water, but apparently convinced that his shots had been ineffectual, turned and disappeared in the forest.

"That's mighty aggravating," growled the Professor, "I don't like to see a shot like that spoiled by an idiot with a rifle. Wonder who he is?"

"Does any one live around here?" asked Jo.

"No, but there's an old log hut over the creek yonder, and I've known wagoners to stay there often; he may be one."

"Suppose we cross over; we may as well hunt on that side as this."

The Professor assented, and, after half an hours' walk, they found a place to cross. Jo was the first over, and in hunting a place to climb the bank, which at this point was almost eight feet high, he suddenly found himself up to his ankles in soft, yielding clay. He extricated himself and followed the Professor, who had ascended the bank a short distance further up the creek.

"You found a clay bank, I see," observed the old man, glancing at Jo's boots.

"Yes, that's what I came here for."

"You hardly needed a gun for that."

"Well, Professor," replied Jo, smiling, "I don't think I could hit the side of a house with a gun; but I wanted to find out where this clay was located, and I'll tell you why."

By this time they had reached the "blind" where the unknown hunter had been in waiting for the ducks.

"Let's rest a while," said the Professor, squatting down behind the screen, "tramping don't agree with me like it used to. Now what about that clay?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said the boy, seating himself cross-legged, facing Matthews. "Hello!" he suddenly exclaimed, as he picked up something from the ground, "here's a briar-root pipe that our friend must have left here. He can't be far away."

"He's over there, I guess."

Jo looked in the direction indicated by Matthews, and could see a portion of a roof and a chimney from which smoke was lazily issuing.

"Cooking the ducks he didn't get," remarked Jo; "let's invite ourselves to breakfast. We can take his pipe over to him; and here are some of his cartridges also. Yes, and a half-dollar," he added, picking up what appeared to be a silver coin, "we're in luck and can pay him for breakfast."

The Professor eagerly snatched the coin from the boy's hand, and regarded it attentively a few moments; then, in a low voice, remarked:

"Jo, we've struck 'em!"

"Struck who?"

Leaning over and placing his mouth close to the lad's ear, he whispered:

"*The counterfeiters!*"

Jo dropped the pipe and gave a low whistle of astonishment, while his eyes opened wide and looked full of interrogation points.

"My boy," said Matthews, "we had better postpone our visit to that cabin; it is best that we go

home now, as the discovery just made is one of great importance and should be acted on at once."

This was agreed to by Travis, and they started homeward. Upon regaining the east side of the creek, Jo asked the Professor if he thought Ward and Buskin were concerned in this business.

"Buskin? No, I had not thought of his connection with it, but I am convinced Ward is—in fact, I have suspected him for more than a month. This gang has been working around here for about six months and all efforts to discover them have been fruitless. Captain Brooks, our sheriff, has often consulted me about it, and only yesterday said that spurious money was being circulated all over this section of the State, and especially at Elk Falls. But why did you mention Buskin?"

"Is his first name Dick?" asked Jo.

The Professor smiled.

"It does sound odd," he replied, "to hear that elegant gentleman spoken of as 'Dick.' His letters come addressed 'Richard Buskin, Esq.'"

"Then he's the man. I've known ever since I first came here that he and Ward and the operator at Spankton, Pete Carter, were in some kind of villainy; but I never had the slightest idea of what it was until you said counterfeiters. Then it was all clear."

Jo then detailed to the Professor all he knew concerning the three men and their suspicious actions, omitting the story of the cipher message, as he did not feel at liberty to divulge that.

The Professor listened attentively, and when the boy had finished remarked:

"Yes, it's all explained; but I had no idea that Buskin was engaged in it. I had my eye on Ward though. One night as I was coming home after hunting some stray stock I ran across him near that lake; he skulked down behind the brush and tried to hide from me, but I recognized him, as the moon was shining brightly. Since then he has appeared suspicious of me. Well, I'll have Brooks over here to-morrow; there have been several government officers around lately, but Brooks' men are worth a hundred of such fellows."

About the middle of the forenoon they reached the tavern, and as they had brought no game home the ridiculous position in which they were placed was fully appreciated by them.

Old Nathan said he hoped they had left the game where he could get at it "wid de wagon."

Mrs. Matthews said she supposed they had sent it to the taxidermist's to be stuffed, while Nettie said perhaps they came back thinking it was Sunday.

"No," said the Professor, taking it all good-humoredly, "we found the game and will go back after it soon; but we want something to eat now."

After lunch the old man and Jo started out, the former telling the lad that he would send to Eudora and have Captain Brooks come over the next night, if possible, to make a raid on the hut.

"Meanwhile," said he, "we must keep our own counsel and say nothing to any one."

Jo promised secresy, and leaving the Professor, went to the depot.

"What did you kill?" was Ward's salutation as he entered the office.

"Nothing; not much game around."

"Don't think you're much of a hunter, anyway."

"Perhaps I'm a *little* better than you suppose," retorted Jo, somewhat nettled. Amateur hunters are usually very touchy when their skill is questioned.

"Where did you go?" asked the agent, noticing the lad's boots.

"Up the creek as far as the lake."

Ward's scowl grew deeper as he resumed his writing. Jo turned to Sam, whom he found in a semi-inebriated state, but able to do all that was required of him.

Simpson stated that "G. O." had offered him a situation temporarily at Hydefield, a station ten miles east of Ardrey; this offer, it is perhaps needless to add, he had accepted and would leave the next day.

Travis thought he might as well have the benefit of Sam's assistance while he could, and as he had paid him for working all the day, concluded he would stay away the remainder of it. Sam was perfectly contented and told him to go.

As the Professor and Jo had frequently talked about land investments, the latter thought this a good time to make a trade. He, therefore, sought

the Professor, and without much dickering bought of him a good-sized piece of land, for which he was to pay a certain amount per month until paid for.

"This," remarked the Professor, "will give you an interest here. There is but one thing I'd advise a young man to go in debt for, and that is land. It is something that won't run away or burn up, and in a new country is always worth what you give for it. By the time you need money badly, this piece of property will bring enough to supply all your wants."

In the evening the Professor told Jo that the messenger had returned from Eudora and all was fixed for the next night.

"It couldn't have happened better," said he, "for Smoother just said he had received a letter from Buskin saying he would be up on to-night's train."

"Don't you think they might go to the cabin to-night and finish their work?"

"Oh, no; for in that case Buskin would not have told Smoother he was coming. However, I believe I'll go up and meet the train and toll him down here. It won't do to take any chances on this thing, as we want to bag them all. Will you come along?"

"Yes, sir," said Jo, and they left the tavern.

On reaching the depot, Jo went inside the office for a moment while the Professor took a position at the counter.

"Say, Deacon, give us a chaw!" and the irrepressible Mr. Simpson lounged up to the counter and reached out his hand to the Professor.

"I do not use the article."

"Oh, you don't? But may be——"

"Sam," interrupted Jo, "this is my friend, Professor Matthews. Professor, this is Mr. Simpson."

"Glad to meet you, old pard!" said Sam, accepting the proffered hand. Then in a whisper to Jo, "Fine looking old top, Jim; plenty of scads, I should judge. Stick to him close."

"Are you a recent arrival?" asked Matthews of Sam.

"I've been here a week or more, admiring your prairies. This is a fine country, Professor—very fine; but do you know that I almost weep when I see so much land lying idle?"

"Indeed! Why is that?"

"Because, if it was all planted in corn every year, and the corn turned into whisky, a feller could get two drinks where now he gets one. Eh?"

"That's a fact; but I think it would be better to figure up how much more money you pay for the corn when it is converted into whisky than when made into bread, and excogitate upon that."

"Ex——*what?* Here, Jim, gi'me your pencil." And grabbing one from Ward's hand, to that gentleman's astonishment, he picked up a blank, and looking at the Professor, told him to go ahead again. "But go slow, or I might get rattled."

"It looks very much like you were already rattled, as you call it, caused by too great a familiarity with ardent spirits."

"Oh no, Professor—you're off; ardent spirits brace a man up—tone him off, as it were. Eh?"

> "Young man, this world is full of sin,
> Caused by whisky, rum and gin,"

rhymed the Professor, slowly and impressively.

"Oh, take him off," said Sam; "I can stand anything but that. Ta-ta, Professor—see you later." And Sam retired into the seclusion of the bedroom.

The train rolled up shortly after this, and the Professor was gratified at seeing Mr. Buskin get off.

The "capitalist" went to the forward part of the train, where Ward was busy checking out with the express messenger, and spoke a few words in a low voice to the agent, who nodded in reply. He then came back, joined the Professor and Jo, and the three were soon in the midst of a merry party at the old tavern.

Everybody appeared in a good humor, but Mr. Buskin was probably the merriest of them all; his smart, witty sayings kept the company in a roar of laughter, in which the Professor and Jo joined heartily. Sallie, though by no means depressed, was not as gay as usual, but her frequent glances of approbation at Buskin and an occasional half-stifled sigh, told the cause of her tongue being still.

About half an hour before the company broke up Jo and Nettie managed to get in their corner. As the boy's bosom was nearly bursting with the important and startling secret it contained, his necessarily abstracted manner was readily noticed

by Nettie, who at once determined to get at the cause of it. By skillful questioning she soon drew from him enough to convince her that something unusual had recently been discovered and that surprising developments were anticipated. Pursuing her questioning, she at last had the satisfaction of hearing from Jo, under the promise of secrecy, all that had taken place and what was expected to occur the next night; the names of the suspected parties were given her, and of course her astonishment was great.

When Jo left the tavern he was at first very angry with himself for having made Nettie acquainted with what he had promised the Professor to keep secret, but the thought of those bright, roguish eyes looking into his, those pretty lips pleading, "Now, Jo, *do* tell me," caused him to feel that if he had not done exactly right, he had acted as the Professor himself would under similar circumstances.

Sallie and Nettie lingered in the sitting-room toasting their feet at the huge fireplace after every one else had retired. Nettie, having succeeded so well with Jo, determined to ascertain why it was that her cousin's spirits were not up to their usual high standard. It required but a few questions to bring forth a full confession from Sallie.

"Nettie," she said, "I know you will think me foolish; first, for giving my affections to one who is almost a stranger, and secondly, for telling you of it."

"I may agree to the first, Cousin Sallie, but I'll

have to think you act wisely in confiding in me. Now tell me who the 'he' is."

"Oh, you know well enough."

"Indeed, I do not. I haven't the slightest idea."

"Well, then, it is Mr.——"

"Yes, Mr. who?" as Sallie hesitated.

"Mr. Buskin!"

"What?" and Nettie turned deadly pale.

"Oh, Nettie! he is *so* handsome, so smart, so refined, so well educated, so——"

"Yes," interrupted Nettie, "I know all that; but *what* is he?"

"Don't look so, Nettie; you're enough to frighten one out of her wits."

"I think you have already lost them. Do you know what this man is?"

"Yes, he's a capitalist; I don't know what else."

"I do, then; he's a *counterfeiter!*"

As Nettie pronounced that awful word she felt a cold shiver pass through her whole frame; then realizing that she had betrayed her trust, she opened her eyes wide, pursed her lips and clapped both hands on her mouth as though to keep the rest in.

"Nettie," said Sallie, indignantly, "you insult a noble man. His nature is far above such a thing; besides, he is wealthy and has no need to stoop so low to obtain money."

"Cousin Sallie, do not deceive yourself; a discovery has just been made which connects him as I told you."

"I'll not believe it; he is honorable and upright. I would sooner believe his accusers the guilty ones."

"Very well then; but for your sake, Cousin Sallie, I will tell you that which was given to me in confidence, believing that by so doing I may prevent your placing your affections on an unworthy object."

Little did the Professor know how his great secret was traveling around. He would have applauded Nettie's object, undoubtedly, but he would have adopted other and more efficient means to prevent Buskin gaining the affections of Sallie.

"Now," said Nettie after she had finished, "hold fast to your heart until to-morrow night; then if you think him innocent I will say nothing further."

"Thank you, Nettie; you're a dear, good girl," said Sallie, kissing her. "I know you only tell me this for my own good; but to-morrow night you will laugh at the fears you now entertain."

"For your peace of mind, I hope so. Goodness! I'm almost afraid to go to bed; I shall dream of counter—O-oh! what's that?"

"Hit's on'y me, Miss Nettie," and old Nathan poked his gray, woolly head through the dining-room door; "thought I'd come and see if yer needed any mo' wood."

"Yes, you can put a big log on and put out the light—come on, Sallie." And the girls rushed out of the room, and shortly after the old tavern was hushed in sleep.

CHAPTER VI.

A CLOSE CALL.

The next day Sam took his departure for Hydefield, promising Jo that he would "brace up" and not drink another drop.

"No, old fel," he said, "whisky and I must part; I now give 'budge' a long farewell, and welcome good old water. Well, the train's going—tra-la-lu!" As he jumped on the platform his coat-tail flew back, disclosing the neck of a bottle protruding from his hip-pocket. It may have contained "good old water," however.

Jo was sorry to see Sam depart, as he had been the life of the depot during his stay. He was no respecter of persons, and everybody, old and young, rich and poor, the railroad dignitary or the common laborer, was "Jim" to him. He had often made Ward stand around in a manner that astonished Jo, yet no offense was ever taken; probably the agent regarded him as a necessary nuisance.

The day wore away drearily to Jo, and he was glad when supper time came. A light snow was

falling and appearances indicated it would continue all night. On reaching the tavern he found the Professor, Buskin and Smoother in the sitting-room.

"Good evening, my little friend," said Buskin, as Jo entered; "what's the news over the wire to-day?"

"I've heard none; were you expecting any?"

"Yes; I thought I would get a message."

"May be that's it," remarked Jo, as a knock was heard at the door.

"A note for Mr. Buskin," said the Professor, who had answered the knock.

Buskin took the note, read it, and saying he would return soon, put on his overcoat and hat and left the house.

Supper was announced in a few minutes, and as Mr. Buskin did not appear, Miss Stubbs asked why he did not come in.

The Professor replied he had received a note calling him away.

"He's a very handsome man," remarked Mrs. Matthews.

"That's what I think," said Miss Stubbs. "And when he looks at you, the fire of genius flashes from those lack lustre orbs of midnight——" This was getting a little too deep for Miss Stubbs, so she filled her mouth full of hot tea, which she was obliged to eject all over Mr. Smoother, to that gentleman's great consternation.

"Oh, Mr. Smoother!" she exclaimed. "Do pardon this dire calamity."

"Pray don't mention it, ma'am," replied Smoother, wiping off his sleeve with a handkerchief. "You were speaking of Mr. Buskin."

"Yes," remarked Nettie; "Aunt Becky and mamma think he's handsome. *I* don't."

"*I* think he's *very* handsome," said Sallie, warmly; "and his *distingue* air, his polished manners, denote him to be——"

"An adventurer," quietly interrupted the Professor.

"Why, uncle, how you shock one; that's a *very* poor joke."

"I didn't mean it as a joke, Sallie; Buskin is a bad man. Smoother, how on earth did he contrive to get into your good graces?"

"Why, Professor, the gentleman introduced himself to me as a prospector in land, and being desirous of selling some of my own, I was glad to meet him. He had excellent letters from New York bankers."

"Yes, I suppose so; forgeries, most likely."

"Uncle Jake," said Sallie, "you are severe on Mr. Buskin. Will you tell us your reasons for it?"

"No, Sallie, I prefer not to, and hope that nothing will be said of this outside. I mentioned this that you might all be on your guard against him. His appearance is deceptive, and his smooth manners help him; he is simply a villain and an unscrupulous confidence man."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Aunt Becky, who had been listening open-mouthed. "To think that we have one of them conference men in our midst!

I've seen 'em, with their white cravats and their eyes turned up to the sky. Oh, Mr. Smoother, avoid him as you would a snake; don't, *pray* don't let him victimize you!"

"Oh," replied Smoother, serenely, "I feel quite secure; I dare say the Professor has been misled by something."

"No he hasn't," said she; "the Professor is *always* right; and I knew there was something wrong about that man the minute I sot eyes on him; people don't come way out here from the East for nothin'." And she looked significantly at Jo, who was quietly eating his supper.

"Aunt Becky," said Sallie, emphatically, "don't you believe it. Mr. Buskin is a perfect gentleman, and goes in the best society at the Falls; I've known him three months myself, and I think him very, *very* agreeable."

"Sallie," said Mrs. Matthews, gravely, "three months is but a short time in which to form an opinion of a stranger; you know comparatively nothing about him, and a girl of your age should be very particular whom she receives attentions from."

"Yes," put in Aunt Becky; "and I think those remarks could well be applied to a certain other Miss."

Nettie colored, well knowing who was meant, but dared not look up. Jo was about to shake the pepper bottle vigorously so that Aunt Becky, who sat next to him, would get the benefit of it in her nostrils, when the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard on the hard ground, arresting the attention of all.

Nettie looked frightened, and Sallie looked from Jo to the Professor as if wishing an explanation, which, however, was not vouchsafed her.

The whole party arose from the table and entered the sitting-room. The Professor opened the front door and was hailed by Captain Brooks, sheriff of the county.

"All right, Professor, we're here—four of us."

"'Light, Cap'n, and take a bite before going," invited Matthews.

"No, we don't want anything to eat; we're hungry for the trail."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the old man. "Hope you'll find enough to satisfy your appetite. I'll be ready in a minute. Jo, do you want to come along?"

"No," Nettie answered for him; "he's going to stay here—aren't you, Jo?"

Though eager to be with the men, he knew it would be folly in him to venture on such an expedition, for being a boy, and inexperienced, he could not render much assistance and might be in the way; besides, he had to be at the office soon. He therefore replied in the negative.

"Very well," said the Professor; "it's better that way. One minute, Cap'n," he shouted, and started out to the stable.

Old Nathan had anticipated the Professor and was leading the horse out the stable door. Mr. Matthews took the horse from the negro and was about to mount, when a hand was laid upon his arm and a voice asked, in an excited whisper, "Uncle, *where are you* going?"

Turning, he saw Sallie, her long, black hair flowing down her back, and her face white as the snow which was fast falling upon her shoulders.

"We are going to Beaver Lake. Why?"

"Is *he* there?"

"*He!* Who in thunder is *he?*"

"Mr. Buskin."

"We expect to find him there—yes."

"Uncle, *don't* go," she pleaded.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't believe there's anything wrong with him, and you might have a fight; and—and some of you may be killed."

"Pshaw! girl, you're foolish. Brooks and his men are going anyway, and I may as well be with them." Saying which, he jumped into the saddle and rode off.

Sallie gave a sigh, and turning, saw Nathan closing the stable door. Instantly she approached the old darkey.

"Nathan," she said, hurriedly, "do you want to make some money to-night?"

"Golly, Miss, I'se allers in for dat."

"Then can you get to Beaver Lake before those men?"

"Sho' 'nuff I kin; dey don't 'pear in no hurry, an' I reckon Ole Gray kin git dar fust."

"Saddle him quick, and I'll be out with a note in a minute." And Sallie rushed into the house while Nathan prepared "Ole Gray" for the trip.

The girl was back by the time he was ready, and

giving the negro the note, told him to take it to Mr. Buskin at the log house near the lake.

"If he's not there, come right back with it; but if he is, then let him have the horse if he wants it. You will be well paid."

As Nathan took the note, Sallie cautioned him to keep out of the way of the men who had just left.

"And," she continued, "if Uncle asks you any questions in the morning, you must say nothing about this; if necessary you must tell a falsehood to get out of it."

"Dat's agin my 'ligion, Miss Sallie—dat won't 'low me to tell a lie; but," he added, settling himself in the saddle and raising his whip, "I'se got a mighty big foot fur walking 'round de troof!" The whip descended on the horse's flank and in an instant the old negro had departed on his mission.

Sallie returned to the sitting-room and pondered over her action, wondering what the consequences would be. She loved Buskin with all the warmth of her ardent nature, and would not—*could* not—believe him guilty of what he had been charged with; appearances were against him, she would admit; but she doubted not his ability to fully and satisfactorily explain everything.

Nathan and Old Gray did good service for Buskin. A rapid ride brought them to the creek near the lake far ahead of the sheriff's party. Being familiar with the surroundings, the negro easily found a fording place, and crossing the stream, he was soon at the log cabin. Dismounting, he hitched the horse

near and knocked loudly with the butt end of his whip on the heavy oak door.

"Who's there?" called a voice from within.

"I'se got a note for Mars' Buckskin," replied Nathan, "an' you better be quick."

The door was partially opened and the gleam of a lantern flashed out upon the darkey, who handed the note through the opening; it was then closed, but soon reopened and the voice of Buskin asked:

"Where's the horse?"

"He's right yer, hitched to de big ellum. If yer turn him aloose in de mawnin' he'll come back. Yer better hurry, 'cos I hear 'em 'cross de lake; so I reckon I'll go now."

"Go on, then; and say nothing about my being here, or I'll blow your woolly head to the——"

"Lor' bless yer, Mars' Buckskin, I'll keep a tight mouf." And the darkey scrambled off.

"Boys, we must cut," said Buskin, addressing Ward and another man who were in the cabin. "Tom, old Matthews' horse is here; you can have him if you like, and perhaps you better take him. I shall stay at the tavern; they can't scare me off."

"I'll take the horse," said the man addressed as Tom, "and ride over to Spankton; let me know through Pete what to do."

"All right. Now, Jim, douse the glim and *git!*"

They were none too soon. Emerging from the den, they could hear the party on the opposite side of the lake, but could see no one, as the night was dark and the snow falling fast.

"You'll have a tough time getting there, Tom, but that horse can stand it if you can," said Buskin.

"Oh, I'll get there, Dick—I'm used to this," replied Tom, as he vaulted into the saddle and made for the prairie.

Buskin and Ward had no difficulty in finding a place to cross the branch, and reached the east side just as the sheriff and party were fording it a few yards below. Setting their faces against the wind, which had just sprung up, they started for town.

"The jig's up," sententiously observed Buskin.

"Yes, for this time," responded Ward. "How do you s'pose they got onto it?"

"Don't know; but I'll bet it's old Matthews' doings."

"He and the kid were hunting over the lake yesterday."

"Yes, Tom saw them; but they can't suspect us, and there's nothing at the shanty that will give *us* away."

When they reached the railroad Buskin gave Ward good-night, saying he was going to the tavern.

"You better come up and stay at the depot," said the agent.

"Well, *you're* a good one. Suppose I'd be such a fool as that? They'd know too quick I was frightened off. No; I think it safer to go back to Matthews'."

They separated, Ward going to the depot, his friend to the tavern.

The wind was now blowing furiously and drifting

the snow as it fell. Buskin, looking ahead to the bright light which shone from the sitting-room window of the old tavern, thanked his good fortune that he was no further away from its cheering influence. "Poor Tom," he thought, as he reached the porch, "I hope he's as near comfort as I am."

Yes, Mr. Buskin, your hope was fulfilled; but the comfort was not in this world.

The folks at the tavern had plenty to talk about after the departure of the party for the lake, and as may be imagined, Miss Stubbs inveighed loudly against Mr. Buskin, stoutly maintaining that he was a "villainous viper."

"Yes, Mr. Smoother," she repeated, struck with the alliterative phrase, "a villainous viper."

"Indeed, Miss Becky, you misjudge him; the gentleman is certainly respectable, as I have seen his letters from New York bankers, and he is undoubtedly quite wealthy."

Mr. Smoother resembled a large number of people who considered a plethoric bank account a genuine patent of respectability.

Mrs. Matthews and Sallie were seated near the fireplace engaged in sewing. Sallie's thoughts kept her busy and she had but little to say during the evening. Mrs. Matthews had dilated extensively upon the all-absorbing topic, and of course had agreed with the Professor.

Jo had managed to get Nettie over in the corner, where they enjoyed a pleasant conversation until the clock striking seven reminded him that he should

be at the office. Nettie expressed genuine regret that he was compelled to leave so early.

No boy ever went from the presence of his first love happier than Jo went from Nettie that evening. Light and joyous was his heart, and he reveled in the blissful thought that away out in this dreary waste he had found one whose heart bounded at his approach, and caused his own to respond—one whom he could love with all the ardor of a boy's first, ungovernable passion, and one upon whom he could place this wealth of love in the full confidence that it would be kept sacred. Nettie's guileless manner, not being masked by a great worldly experience, shone out clear and transparent in all its young simplicity. Being scarcely more than a child, she had yet caused Jo to feel that there was a *something* in this life worth living—worth striving for; and as the boy wended his way to the depot, with the wind beating the snow in his face, he made a firm resolve that he would win fame and fortune to bring to her whom he considered well worthy of both.

If Jo was happy, Nettie was equally so; and after he had left she drew a chair up to the fire and joined her mother and cousin.

Mrs. Matthews would now and then make some remark which, being entirely foreign to the thoughts of the two girls, would hardly elicit a response from either. Mr. Smoother and Miss Stubbs employed themselves in looking over albums, books and pictures; and thus the time passed until after ten o'clock, when Mrs. Matthews said she wished her husband would come home.

"It's a bad night," said Smoother, "and I feel sorry for any man who has to be out in it; the storm is increasing in violence every minute."

"I wonder where papa is?" said Nettie.

"Perhaps Mr. Buskin has inwiggled him somewhere," remarked Miss Stubbs.

"Oh, no, Miss Becky," said Smoother, smiling pleasantly on the ancient maid; "Mr. Buskin left long before the Professor did, and it is quite likely went in a different direction altogether."

At that moment the door was thrown violently open, a strong gust of wind blew the snow and a cold chill over all the occupants of the room, and in walked Buskin, who immediately closed the door and approached the fire.

The old saying was fully verified, for here was the person they had that moment been discussing. To Mrs. Matthews and Miss Stubbs the adage applied itself with force, as they were almost willing to believe that Mr. Buskin was the identical party mentioned in it, and the manner of his sudden appearance seemed to confirm their belief. However this may be, it is doubtful if his satanic majesty could have created any more consternation in that room than did Buskin. Smoother, however, was but little surprised, and was heartily glad to see his friend back.

"Buskin, old fellow," he said, "I'm glad you have returned; we were just discussing your absence, and concluded you had run over to Eudora."

"No," replied Buskin, shaking his overcoat and

removing the snow from his head and neck; "I merely went up town, and became involved in a discussion from which I found it impossible to break until a short time ago."

It was plain that Sallie felt relieved at this explanation of his absence, for blinded as she was by her passion for him, she never once thought of doubting his word.

He had scarcely finished speaking when a commotion was heard on the porch, the door again opened and the Professor entered, followed by Sheriff Brooks and his men.

"Whew!" ejaculated the Professor, as he walked to the fireplace, removed his fur hat and shook the snow from his gray locks, "this is going to be a wild storm. Come to the fire, boys, and warm yourselves; we'll have some hot coffee soon."

"Rather a hard night for riding, Professor," remarked Buskin.

"Thunderation!" exclaimed Matthews. "What are you doing here?"

"I am enjoying your generous hospitality."

"Well, sir, you will enjoy it no longer. I never turned a dog away from my house before, and I dislike to commence now. It's a tough night, but you know my reasons.

> Therefore, Sir, I'll say no more;
> Now get yourself outside that door."

The old man's speech was intently listened to by all, and when he finished with the rhyme and

pointed with his forefinger to the door, his eyes lit up with an old-time determination. The sheriff's party, all of whom had seen the same look before, knew that the person addressed had but one thing to do, and that was to be done pretty quick.

Buskin, however, with a supercilious sneer, bowed to the Professor and replied:

"Very well, Mr. Matthews; I never remain anywhere an unwelcome guest. You say I know your reasons for your action, but I must insist upon the privilege of contradicting you. Ladies, I bid you all good-night, as the Professor is determined I shall leave. Miss Garnet, I sincerely hope I shall have the good fortune to meet you again; though," he added in a lower tone, and bending close to her, "if you had had your wish I would be miles away by this time."

His keen eyes seemed to pierce her very soul. She shrank from his gaze and turned her head.

"Buskin!" roared the Professor, "I'll give you just five seconds to get out that door!"

"Very well, sir," replied Buskin, dignifiedly; "I cannot account for this treatment, but"—significantly—"perhaps some day we will understand each other better."

Buttoning up his overcoat, he opened the door and went out into the stormy night, with a smile on his lips for the ladies and a deep, bitter curse in his heart for the Professor.

CHAPTER VII.

POOR TOM.

When Jo reached the depot he found it entirely deserted, the fires nearly out and the office as cold as a barn. He at once set about making the place comfortable, and in a short time the fires were roaring and the stoves fast assuming a red heat.

How dismally the wild wind howled from over the prairie and whistled around the corner of that little depot, and how savagely it pelted the snow against the window-panes! Jo shivered as each furious blast would strike the building with such force as to threaten its very foundation, and thanked his good fortune that he was safely housed from the raging storm.

It was natural that the boy's thoughts should be centered upon the log hut near Beaver Lake, and he impatiently wished for some one to come and inform him of the result of the expedition.

He at last concluded, however, that he would be able to hear nothing before morning, and cutting out his instruments, prepared to retire. Just then the

waiting-room door opened and Ward, covered with snow from his fur cap to his boots, entered. Locking and bolting the door after him, he came into the office, and removing his overcoat, hat and boots, took a seat by the stove. Jo was considerably surprised to see him, having felt certain that the sheriff's party would capture him at the hut. He was determined to find out something, if possible, and as the agent showed no disposition to talk, he began:

"Mr. Ward," he said, "you must have had a hard time getting over from your boarding-house; you should have started earlier."

The agent looked sharply at the boy and replied, snappishly:

"Yes; so I should."

Jo was silent a few moments, then again ventured:

"You look like you'd been out in the storm all night."

"Do I?" And Ward accompanied the interrogatory with a look that told Jo danger lurked ahead; but nothing daunted, the boy returned to the charge.

"Have you been very far?"

"What you want to know for? What business is it of your'n? S'pose I have, what of it?" And Ward nervously clasped the arms of his chair, and leaning his body forward, glared fiercely at the boy.

"Nothing, only I thought you would not object to telling me."

"When I want you to know anything concerning my affairs I'll volunteer the information—that's

enough. Now, put some wood in the stove!" he commanded.

"If you're cold, you can put it in yourself—I'm going to bed." And Jo opened the door of his sleeping-room.

"Here!" shouted the agent, "come back and put some wood in this stove or I'll break every bone in your body!"

Instantly Jo turned, and placing the lamp he held in his hand on the table, quickly advanced to the agent, and with flashing eyes hissed through his closed teeth:

"I dare you to try it, sir!"

Ward jumped to his feet and raised his clenched hand threateningly. Jo looked him firmly in the eye and stood boldly up to him.

"Try it on, Mr. Ward," he said firmly; "I'm only a boy, but I think I'm man enough for *you!*"

Ward made a motion as if to strike the lad, but seeing the determined look in his eye, lowered his hand and turned to the stove.

Jo picked up the lamp and again started for the bedroom. At that instant a call was heard above the roar of the storm.

"Jim, let me in, quick!"

Both knew that voice. Ward flew to the waiting-room door and admitted Buskin.

"What's up?" asked the agent.

"Oh, nothing, only Matthews made me climb out. He's on to the whole racket. Cursed if I want another such walk. I thought I'd never get here."

"It's a fearful night. Poor Tom—it's a scratch if he makes Spankton!"

"He can't do it; hope he had sense enough to stop somewhere."

This colloquy was carried on in the waiting-room and could not be heard by Jo, who, despairing of learning anything that night concerning the raid on the cabin, entered his room and went to bed.

When the boy retired, the agent and his friend came into the office, and seated by the stove held a long and earnest conversation. Their frequent scowling glances towards the room where Jo lay sleeping showed that the boy was being freely discussed by them.

The train from the east, being late, did not arrive at Ardrey until midnight. When it had passed, the two men went into the sleeping-room. Jo lay apparently asleep, but between his half-closed eyelids he saw Ward glaring at him.

"D—— the kid!" he heard him mutter. "If I was sure of it I'd choke him now!"

The boy's heart thumped so hard against his breast that he feared Ward would hear it; but that individual soon disrobed and crawled into the bed, whither Buskin had preceded him.

The old negro, Nathan, well-nigh exhausted from his long, cold tramp, reached the tavern a few minutes after the sheriff's party rode up. He went into the kitchen, hugged the stove and drank hot coffee, while his wife Eliza, who was cook for the tavern, fixed up a lunch for the Professor and friends.

"I'd like ter know wha' you been, Nathan Jones," scolded Eliza. "Spec' yo' been bruisin' 'round dat grocery."

"'Deed I isn't, honey; I on'y been up to de depo' to hear Mars' Jo talk. You ought ter hear him tell his funny stories—yah! yah!" And the cunning old negro threw back his head and laughed long and loud at the picture his imagination conjured up.

"Wha' story he tell?" asked Eliza, pausing in the act of pouring out coffee.

"I tell yo' bumby, honey; I mus' go out now an' put up de hoss."

"I doan' b'lieve he tell yo' no story, Nathan Jones. Yo' been up to some deblement, *I* know; doan' try to fool dis po' old nigger."

"I'se not foolin', honey. Sho's yo' bo'n I'se on'y ben up to der depo'; an' I tell yo' all 'bout it in de mawnin' sho'."

"If dese yer men ain't af'er yore ole carkiss Nathan Jones, den I doan' know nuffin', dat's all."

"Now, 'Liza," replied Nathan, indignantly, "wha' de use sayin' dat w'en yo' know better? I won't talk to yo' no mo'."

"Well, I never seed anything to beat dis yere in all *my* growins-up," growled the old negress as her husband went out the door.

While Nathan was attending to the Professor's horse the sheriff came out and requested him to take care of the animals belonging to his party also, saying that as the night was so bad they had decided to remain at the tavern until the next day.

After giving all a good feed the old negro closed the stable door and approached the kitchen, but had just reached the step-stone when he heard a loud neigh from the direction of the stable. Retracing his steps, he was gratified beyond expression at seeing Old Gray poke his head over the gate and "nicker" for admission. Nathan joyfully opened the gate and led the good old horse from the driving, blinding snow into the barn. In a few minutes the animal was in the stall contentedly munching a liberal allowance of corn, and the old darkey breathed free once more as he realized that his accomplishment of "walkin' 'roun' de troof" would not be called into requisition.

The next day dawned clear and cold. The wind was still high and the snow drifting; all trains were late, the wire was down, and no one had any idea when a train would be in from either direction.

Nathan at the first opportunity informed Miss Sallie of the result of his ride, and she, true to her promise, had liberally rewarded him.

Poor girl! her's was a hard lot; for though she tried to regard Buskin as a fugitive from justice and wholly unworthy a thought, her heart would rebel and all was forgotten save that she loved him.

The Professor, Sheriff Brooks and Jo had a consultation at the tavern before dinner, and though, after comparing notes, it was plain to them that Buskin and Ward were engaged in the nefarious business of counterfeiting, the evidence was all purely circumstantial and would not justify an arrest. Plates, dies and other evidences of the base

purpose which the old hut had been put to were found, but nothing was known that would absolutely criminate any one.

After a hearty dinner Captain Brooks and his *posse* mounted their horses, bade the tavern folks good-bye and set off in the direction of Eudora.

Ward and Buskin were ill at ease all day; something seemed to trouble them greatly. Jo noticed that every time he went to the telegraph instrument they watched him nervously. Late in the afternoon he put on his "ground-wire" east, and found the wire "O. K." to Spankton. He made a few dots with his key, and Ward eagerly asked:

"Is the wire O. K.?"

"Yes, to Spankton."

"Good! Ask Carter if he has anything for me."

And Jo called, "Sk., Sk., Sk., Ay."

"I., I., I., Sk.," came back in response.

"Ward asks *5?" wrote Jo.

"Nothing, Sk.," came back.

"Carter has nothing," Jo said to Ward.

The oath uttered by Buskin was terrible. It made Jo shudder to hear it. The two men looked at each other in horror.

Towards night a train made its appearance from the east, which Buskin boarded for Spankton, and about nine o'clock Jo received the following cipher message, which he readily translated:

WARD, Ardrey: SPANKTON, 12–7.

Home till perished here then here have reached Monday stay must never next will he Tom. R. B.

*5—Telegraphically, "Have you anything?"

About a week after this, two men drove into Ardrey in a wagon and stated that they had found the body of a man about five miles from town in a snowdrift, their attention having been attracted to it by a foot projecting therefrom. 'Squire Hathaway, justice of the peace and *ex-officio* coroner, took a jury and proceeded to the spot, where an inquest was held, resulting in the verdict that deceased, name unknown, had come to his death by cold and exposure. The body was brought to Ardrey to be prepared for burial, and was seen as it lay in the wagon by almost every man, woman and child in the village, none of whom, however, were able to identify it. A briar-root pipe, a package of tobacco and about twenty dollars in greenbacks were the only articles found in the pockets of the deceased. The pipe was easily recognized by the Professor and Jo as being the same that they had seen at the "blind" near the lake. This settled the question of identity for the Professor and Jo, and the anxiety of Ward and Buskin the day after the storm was now explained.

CHAPTER VIII.

STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER.

Six months have elapsed since the night of the raid on the old cabin. Winter has yielded to the gentle influence of the mild showers and balmy breezes of spring, which are now in turn succeeded by glorious summer.

The opening of the busy season had thrown the little village of Ardrey into stirring activity; buildings were being erected with amazing rapidity, real estate was advancing and everything indicated a brilliant future for the thriving, bustling town.

Mr. Buskin had not shown himself since the day he went to Spankton. Miss Garnet had long since returned to Elk Falls. Mr. Smoother and Miss Becky Stubbs had accompanied her, but the latter, having been most ingloriously jilted by the ambitious Smoother, who had married a lady of wealth, was now making her permanent abode at the Matthews tavern; there her sour temper, rendered even more acrid by her disappointment, often struck terror to the loving hearts of Jo and Nettie. The

Professor and his wife were still the same amiable couple, and looked with favor upon the addresses of Jo toward their daughter.

Affairs at the depot were about the same, though Ward had made himself so obnoxious to his operator that the latter had, on the opening of spring, applied to the superintendent of the road for a transfer to some other point; this had been promised him as soon as it could be arranged, and he was now trying to content himself, expecting daily to be released from his tormentor.

It had been hard for Jo to refrain from resenting the shameful treatment that Ward had subjected him to, and Will Newins, a young dry goods clerk, between whom and the young operator a sort of friendship had sprung up, had often derided him for his lack of manhood in permitting himself to be thus meanly used. Newins, it may be remarked, had a tender passion for Nettie, and while he professed a great friendship for Jo, nothing would have pleased him better than to see his rival out of the way.

One morning as they were talking together on the depot platform Ward came out and yelled, "Travis, come in here, I want you!" in such an overbearing manner that Jo felt the hot blood mount to his cheek, while he trembled all over with passion.

"Will," said he to Newins, "that's hard to stand."

"I should say it was," replied Will; "and I don't think much of any one who takes it. What do you s'pose a certain young lady would think if she knew you to be a coward?"

The wily William had applied the torch to the most combustible point.

"You are right," said Jo; "and I'll bear it no longer."

Newins gave a smile of satisfaction, and commending the boy for his manly resolution, left the depot.

"Mr. Ward," said Jo as he entered the office, "if you will buy my time I'll leave to-night."

This was a pleasant surprise for the agent, who had long wished Jo to leave; therefore he replied he would gladly do it. The lad then went to the telegraph instrument, and calling up the general office, sent in his resignation. He was requested to remain a week longer, at the end of which time it was probable he could be transferred; but he declined and requested a pass to Darden, which was telegraphed him at once. No amount of persuasion could induce him to remain until relief could be sent. He was fully aroused and determined to submit no longer to Ward's authority.

Jo gave the agent an order for his salary, and received in return the amount due him to date.

"You have forgotten to deduct your commission," said Jo, after counting the money.

"No, I haven't," snarled Ward; "I'll make you a present of that for leaving."

Jo informed Nettie of what had occurred and said he would leave on the eleven o'clock train that night.

"And where will you go?" she asked.

"I know not," was the reply; "but I have no fears for the future."

"But you will not go off this road?" anxiously.

"Yes, I must; there is no vacancy just now and will have to go elsewhere—probably to Chicago."

"I am so sorry; I knew it would have to be sometime, but I never thought it would be so hard for me to bear."

"Indeed, Nettie, it is sweet of you to say that; but I shall write often, and hope your letters will be as frequent as mine."

"To be sure they will. But, Jo! oh, I do so hate to let you go! We——" and here the little girl's feelings overcame her and she burst into a flood of tears.

Mrs. Matthews and her sister came in at this juncture with the Professor, and Nettie, through her tears, told them of Jo's intended departure. Mrs. Matthews was much affected, but Miss Stubbs merely sneered, and saying it would be a lucky thing for Nettie, left the room.

The Professor approved Jo's course, and thought he deserved great credit for his forbearance during the time he had been associated with Ward.

"Never you mind, Jo," said the old man; "we'll have him and the rest of the gang yet."

"I hope you will, for it's all nonsense for me to say I don't hate Ward after the way he has treated me."

Jo then called on Will Newins and told him he had resigned and would leave that night.

"Good!" ejaculated Will; "I like your pluck. Where will you go?"

"To Chicago, I think, or may be St. Louis; I can get a situation at either place, I guess."

"Course you can; you can get a job anywhere."

After a little further conversation Jo left the store, Will telling him as he went out that he would be over at train time to see him off."

The boy arranged everything for his departure; he spent the evening with Nettie at the tavern, and when the old clock struck the hour of ten, arose to take his leave. Mrs. Matthews made no effort to conceal her feelings, and wept as if Jo had been her own child. Nettie kissed him and burst into tears. Jo imprinted a warm kiss on her pale cheek, and handing the weeping girl to her mother, left the house with Mr. Matthews.

"Jo," said the old man, "we hate to lose you, but I guess you'll be back here again."

"Oh, yes, for I can never forget your kindness; but it does seem hard that when I was so happy at the house I could not be better off at the depot."

"The sun never shines on the whole world at once, my boy, though it's likely if you had remained you would have been more pleasantly situated before long."

"Yes; but this continual hoping, with nothing but disappointments, was wearing on me, and I am glad I have taken this step."

On reaching the depot the Professor gave Jo his hand, which the boy wrung warmly.

"I wish you good luck, Jo, and hope soon to see you again. Guard your honor well, and strive for the top; never be cast down by disappointments, and

If in life's bitter struggle you should fall behind,
Don't forget that success crowns a bright, active mind.

Now good-bye, and God bless you."

"Good-bye, my kind old friend!" was Jo's response, and the Professor left the depot.

At eleven o'clock the whistle of the locomotive was heard, and soon the train rolled up to the depot. Jo placed his valise in the only coach and went back in the office to say a few parting words to the agent, who was standing leaning against his desk.

"Mr. Ward," said the boy, "I wish to say before I leave, that had you treated me a little better I might never have left this office."

"You brought it all on yourself," said Ward, doggedly.

"You are wrong," replied Jo, with warmth; "you started at me the day I came here."

"You lie, you little puppy! If you hadn't given me cause you never would have had a word from me!"

"I never gave you cause, sir!" advancing closer to the agent and looking up steadily in his face.

"What! You confounded little imp! you threaten me, do you? I've a mind to choke you——"

"No, you haven't," interrupted Jo, hotly; "you're too much of a coward—I knew that when I first saw you!"

"Get out, you miserable cur, and go back to the other dogs at Jake Matthews'!"

This was too much. Jo's passion was already at the boiling point, and scarcely had Ward finished

when he drew back his right arm and drove his fist straight between the agent's eyes, knocking him over against the iron safe.

"You may abuse *me*, but not my friends," said the boy, as Ward lay on the floor and made no effort to rise.

The whistle of the locomotive at that instant sounded, the bell rang and the train started. Jo sprang out the door just as Will Newins came around the corner of the depot.

"Bully for you, Jo!" he shouted; "I saw you settle him—you're a brick! Good-bye!" he yelled, as Jo jumped on the rear platform and shouted back his farewell.

CHAPTER IX.

A DEATH BLOW.

The day following Jo's departure dawned brightly on the village of Ardrey. The summer was far advanced, the birds sang joyously and all nature seemed to smile.

Old Nathan was up early, and after attending to his duties at the tavern went to the depot and entered the door. In less than a minute he emerged in the utmost haste, his hat off, his eyes and mouth wide open, while on his whole countenance was depicted the utmost consternation. He disdained the platform steps, and clearing them at a bound, ran rapidly toward the tavern, at which place he was met by the Professor.

"What on earth is the matter? You look like you'd seen a ghost."

"Fo' de Lor', Mars' Purfessor, I'se seen wuss'n dat—Mars' Ward's dun been killed!"

"What!" exclaimed Matthews. "Ward killed? Who did it?"

"Sho' yo' bo'n; I foun' him dar just now at de

deepo' layin' on his back an' de blood all roun' his head!"

"Who did it?"

"Lor' bress yo' heart, I didn't stop to ast him any questions. I jis' *run!*"

"Come along, Nathan," said the Professor, starting towards the depot, "let's see about this."

"No, *sah!* I been dar oncet, dat's 'nuff. I doan like dead men nohow, 'specially when dey's got blood all over 'em; le'me stay here, Mars' Purfessor."

The Professor yielded to the old negro's entreaty, and starting off alone, walked rapidly up the road. Meeting Judge West and 'Squire Hathaway, he informed them what Nathan had seen and they both accompanied him to the station.

A ghastly sight met their gaze as they entered the office. There was the dead body of Ward stretched out on the floor near the safe, his head lying in a pool of blood, his face upturned and his gray eyes staring out through the broken spectacles which still surmounted his nose. A sickening-looking gash on the temple showed, that death had been caused by violent contact with some heavy instrument. It did not take long for the news to spread over that little town, and in a short time the depot was filled with a crowd of men and boys.

Will Newins, elbowing his way through the crowd, reached the inner office, and looking at Ward's lifeless body, exclaimed: "*I* know who did this—I saw it!"

"Who?" asked a dozen voices.

"Jo Travis!" answered Will. "Oh, well," he continued, as some of his auditors shook their heads and others laughed at the absurdity of such an idea, "I guess I know what I'm talking about. I saw it all through that window. Jo was standing there, and Ward right here, and Jo drew back and gave him a knock that sent him a-whizzing. I didn't think it amounted to much and went on to the train, and just as I turned the corner of the depot Jo came running out."

"*Running?*" repeated Judge West.

"Yes; as the train was starting he had to run. I hollered to him and he yelled back to me to take care of myself, and in a minute he and the train were gone."

"Did you go in the depot after the train left?" asked the 'Squire.

"*Did I?*" Well, not much. Ward and I had no love for each other; besides, I didn't think he was hurt much, so I went home."

"Did you see anything in Jo's hand?" asked the Professor.

"No; but that's not saying he didn't have something, for I didn't have much of a show to see any weapon."

A hundred more questions were fired rapidly at Newins by half as many men, but nothing further could be elicited. He had evidently told all he knew, and no amount of questioning could make it appear otherwise than that Jo was the murderer of Ward.

A jury of inquest was speedily impaneled by 'Squire Hathaway, which, after viewing the body and hearing Newins' evidence, rendered a verdict to the effect that James Ward came to his death by a blow on the head inflicted with some heavy instrument in the hands of Joseph H. Travis.

The Professor walked home with a heavy heart. He knew this would be a terrible shock to his family, all of whom loved the boy as if, in truth, he was one of its members. He dared not think how hard it would be for Nettie. He had long observed the intimacy that existed between them, and he had been perfectly satisfied at the manner in which events were shaping themselves.

The family was still seated at the breakfast table when the Professor made his appearance. All had heard the news, discussed it and unanimously concluded that although Ward was a mean man, it was a little too bad for him to be killed. They eagerly inquired of the Professor if he had any further news.

"Yes," he replied, taking his seat at the table; "the coroner's jury have agreed upon the party who killed him."

"Who was it?" Mrs. Matthews, Aunt Becky and Nettie all asked at once.

"Prepare yourselves," he answered, slowly and gravely, "for a shock. The party who is charged with the crime is well known to us, and was loved by most of us." His voice quivered, and dropping his chin on his breast, he faltered out: "It was Jo!"

For a moment no word was spoken. Amazement had seized upon the group. Nettie's face gave evidence of the terrible shock she had received. Her cheeks were ashy pale, her eyes open wide, the pupils dilated, her mouth partly open, while through it came her breath quick and short. Pressing her hand on her throat as though to relieve a choking sensation, she gasped:

"Father, *is* this true?"

"Without a doubt," he replied.

Nettie bowed her head on the table, but not a sound came from her.

"Well, well," said Aunt Becky, "to say that I am astonished don't express it! When you said that boy done it, I was actually putrefied; it's enough to take one's breath away. *Now*, Professor Jacob Matthews, you see what I've told you all along—that boy was nothing but a——"

"Becky!" interrupted Mrs. Matthews, "we had better find out how it happened before we utterly condemn him. Tell us how it was, Jacob."

"I bet he just went up behind that poor man and knocked him in the head before——"

"Goodness, Becky! don't talk that way!" expostulated Mrs. Matthews.

"——before he could turn 'round," continued Aunt Becky, not noticing the interruption; "and I'm sure he never gave Mr. Ward a chance."

"Aunt Becky!" and Nettie lifted up her streaming eyes and looked reproachfully at the spinster across the table, "I am sure if any one in this world

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would treat his enemy fairly, Jo would; and I know he never struck that man without good cause."

"There's no use discussing that point," said the Professor; "the evidence showed they were face to face, and Jo knocked him down with something he had in his hand."

"Yes, of course," snapped Aunt Becky. "I knew there was something underhanded about it; he could never have done it without—he was too small."

"Mr. Ward was a very powerful man, wasn't he, Professor?" asked Mrs. Matthews.

"He was plenty able to whip two like Jo."

"Father, who saw it?" asked Nettie.

"Will Newins."

"Any one else?"

"No."

"Papa, I don't believe Jo did it!"

"Why, my child?"

"Because he was too small, as Aunt Becky says, to give him such a blow unless he had some kind of a weapon; and I *know* he wouldn't take that advantage."

"He wouldn't, hey?" snarled Aunt Becky, "you've let him so completely pull the wool over your eyes that you can't see through a mill-stone. For my part, I don't know what fathers and mothers are for, if they can't look after their children."

"Tut, tut, Becky," interrupted the Professor. "You were always predjudiced against the boy; he was no worse than other boys of his age, but a great deal better than some."

"Will they arrest him, papa, do you think?" asked Nettie.

"If they catch him, yes; but I'll do what I can for him."

"Now, Jake Matthews," said Aunt Becky, "don't you go and make a fool of yourself over that boy on account of any misguided notion you may be struck with. Let him alone; he'll hang soon enough without your interference."

This was too much for Nettie, who arose and with a heavy heart left the room, sobbing piteously.

"I suppose," said Miss Stubbs, "the boy left last night as he intended?"

"Yes," replied the Professor.

"But won't they telegraph and have him caught?" asked Mrs. Matthews.

"No—that is, there is no one in his place yet; he told me last night that an operator would be here on this morning's train, but that won't get in for an hour."

"I warrant he took all of this into consideration when he hit that poor man," said Miss Stubbs, giving her corkscrew curls a toss.

"Becky," sharply replied the Professor, "I will not listen to any more such talk; if that boy *was* the cause of Ward's death, depend upon it he was wrought up to it, and Ward only got what he deserved. I'll go to the depot now and see if there's anything new."

The train from the east pulled up just as the Professor reached the depot. Before it had stopped,

Mr. Sam Simpson, bearing in his hand a small bundle wrapped in a newspaper, jumped from the caboose and walked briskly into the depot. He was at first somewhat disconcerted at seeing the waiting-room crowded with people, but quickly recovering his assurance asked, in an officious manner:

"Where's Mr. Ward?"

"You'll find the gentleman in a box yonder," replied a bystander.

Mr. Simpson entered the office and found that the man had correctly informed him; for there, in a plain-stained pine coffin, each end of which rested on a chair, was all that was mortal of James P. Ward. Simpson was placed in possession of the facts as elicited at the inquest, then, placing his paper bundle in a drawer, started to the telegraph instrument to apprise the general office of what had occurred.

As he was about to open the key, he felt a touch on the shoulder, and turning around saw Professor Matthews, who at once seized his hand, exclaiming:

"Mr. Simpson, I am glad to see you; they say Jo did this, but I know Ward was to blame, and so do you, but these people can't think so; neither would a jury in the absence of evidence to prove it; now, if Jo is brought back here it will go hard with him. I believe you're a friend of his?"

"That's all right, old pard! I tumble—say no more; they don't catch him if I have to bust the message; you can bet on that."

CHAPTER X.

SAM AND HIS "PARDS."

Sam Simpson was one of a class of operators who could never stand prosperity; the possession of a few dollars or a steady situation was such a rarity with him, that when a position was secured he always made the most of it at the start. He was a fine operator, and had worked in nearly all the principal offices of the country and a great many small ones, but of late years he had not been able to hold a situation longer than pay-day; then, feeling himself enormously wealthy, he would start on a spree, which never ended as long as money and credit held out; then finding himself minus both and unable to procure employment, he would sally forth in search of a new and unexplored field, being the recipient of friendly lifts by accommodating railroad conductors, who seldom refuse this kindness to impecunious operators.

Sam had made a few acquaintances on his first visit to Ardrey and these, of course, congratulated him on his good fortune in securing a position which they hoped would prove permanent.

In the afternoon the remains of the late Mr. Ward were consigned to earth and old Nathan straightened up things in the office, removing all evidences of the terrible tragedy.

After the 9 p. m. train had passed west, Sam and two of his old cronies seated themselves at the instrument table in the office, on which the convivial operator had placed a long-necked bottle and a box of cigars.

"Now, boys," he said, opening the box and exhibiting a fine brand of cigars, "help yourselves, and we'll have a hog-killing time. When a man's prosperous he never lacks friends, and when an operator has a sit, he can always get credit. This, my friends, is the wherefore of these refreshments."

"Well, Sam," said Tim Fangle, a bloated, red-faced, blear-eyed old chap, "yer know we didn't wait fer the day of prosperity to strike up an acquaintance. Eh, Bob?"

"No, Tim," replied Bob, in a squeaking, rasping voice, "to be sure we didn't, and Sammy here knows that well. D'ye mind the day he kim over to Mac's and stood 'im off fer the crowd? He! he! I knowed yer were the right sort, Sammy."

"Betcherlife, old man, there's nothing like travel to polish up a fel.; it's a good thing to have an august presence and plenty of dignity, especially if your wardrobe is a little off. I'm always on my dig. before a bartender. Let's have little nip in remembrance of that occasion. You first, Tim."

Tim took the bottle and with a "Here's lookin'

at yer," gulped down several swallows; then smacking his lips and wiping them with the back of his hand, pushed the bottle over to Bob, who raised it with as much reverence as if the philosopher's stone had been contained therein.

"That's Mac's best," he remarked, after applying his nostrils to the bottle and taking a long sniff. "He knows how to treat a good customer," he added, holding the bottle up to the light and contemplating it critically with one eye closed. "*We* never have this stuff shoved over the bar at us, do we, Tim?"

"I guess not," replied Tim, "'lection whisky is plenty good enough for us. Now *that*," looking at the bottle out of which Bob was taking a long draught, "is what *I* call oil from the can."

Sam next tested the quality of the liquor, and by the ease and grace with which he poured it down his throat from the bottle, one would naturally infer that he was a competent and experienced judge.

"Yes," he said, "that's good whisky; now, take a good cigar and we'll talk over old times."

Three cigars were lit, three chairs tilted back and three pairs of feet placed on the table, threatening its complete demolition. Sam then regaled his guests with an account of his doings since leaving Ardrey—how he had been "fired" at Hydefield for getting "chuck up" and leaving the office to run itself; how he had been given another trial by the superintendent, who sent him to Elk Falls temporarily, where he worked faithfully until the regular

operator's return, and finally how he had obtained a position as waiter in a restaurant.

"Yes," continued Sam, "I humiliated myself to that extent, and got along first-rate until one day an old duffer came in and asked for some beef *a la mode*. He slung it at me so fast that I couldn't tell what he was talking about. 'Very sorry,' says I, 'just out; give you a leg o' mutton, fried hash or ox-tail soup—which would you prefer?' The old coon eyed me kinder sassy like, then he says: 'Young man, I want some beef *a la mode*.' 'Well,' says I, getting my dander up a little, 'I'd like to accommodate you, but we haven't got any beefalo meat.' Then he shook the bill of fare in my face and says: 'What you got it on here for?—you're misleading the public!' And he was going to give me more of the same sort, when I broke in and told him if he said beefalo meat was on that bill of fare he was a——"

"Yes, what?" said Tim and Bob quickly.

"Well, I was going to call him a liar, but I changed my mind, for when I got there he rose up and I went sailing head-first out of the door; and after he had bounced me, the proprietor bounced me also. Hard luck, eh?"

"Pretty hard, Sammy," squeaked Bob; "but yer misfortunes make me feel dry like—let's have another."

The six feet were taken off the table and the bottle again passed around.

"Sam, me boy," remarked Tim, chewing the

stump of his cigar, "you'll have to stick to lightning; running a hotel ain't in your line."

"So I found out. I had a good loaf after that, and was about to try my luck on a farm when I heard the kid here had resigned; so I put in a bid for the posish, and here I am."

"And you'll stay with us, me boy?" said Tim, regarding him affectionately.

"I hope so; you see I've brought my Saratoga with me." And Sam produced the paper bundle, which he unwrapped, disclosing a collar-box containing two paper collars, a necktie and a pair of socks.

"Did ye have it checked through, Sammy?" asked Bob.

"Yes, but they didn't charge me for extra baggage; hope I'll find a wardrobe around here, as clothes are apt to lose their nice fit when packed away—eh?"

"Those are new socks, are they, Sam?" asked Tim.

"Yes—never worn."

"And never wet," said Tim; "this is as good a time as any."

"Correct—help yourselves. After you, Tim. Take a good pull; there's plenty more."

The bottle was drained and another one produced; cigars were lit, feet planted on the table, and Sam once more entertained the company with his experiences. The three topers were fast approaching a mellow condition, when Tim suddenly chilled his companions by reverting to the late tragedy, asking Sam if he thought Travis would be caught by the constable's message.

"Caught!—no. Brown's message went to Darden, and I took care that all the boys on the line heard it. Of course the kid got wind of it and skipped the train somewhere. 'Rah for the kid! He's a (hic) brick!"

"Brown won't let up on him, though," remarked Bob; "he'll get him if it takes twen'y years."

"Well, I hope he don't," said Sam.

"An' I hope he *does!*" squeaked Bob, his little eyes snapping at Sam.

"Look 'ere, Bob Weazel," said Tim, blinking his eyes at Bob, "wha's matter with you, anyway? Don' yer know he's Sam's frien'—say?"

"So's Brown mine; an' if I kin put 'im onto the track, betcher swee' life I'll do it."

"Just so, Mr. Weazel," said Sam quietly, "it's no more than right that you should help your friends; it's a quality I admire. As Shakspeare says, 'When lovely woman stoops ——' No, I'm a little off on that. Never mind, you know what I mean. Tim, why don't you say something?"

Tim said something, and the bottle was again called into requisition.

Bob then lit a fresh cigar, and rising to his feet made a painful effort to reach the door; he rolled along unsteadily until Sam's voice caused him to halt; he turned around, his feet wide apart, his body swaying and his knees occasionally bending with a jerk, caused by his efforts to preserve a perpendicular.

"Bob," said Sam, "I thought you'd stay here to-night."

"No, I'm bound to go. Fa-(hic)-angle will stay, woncher, Tim?"

"Yesh, I ain' 'fraid (hic); I don' care for dead men."

"I don't either," said Sam, "but after seeing a fresh stiff layin' round here, I'd like all the company I can get."

Bob took three or four cautious steps and stopped within a few feet of where he had been sitting; raising his right hand and gesticulating violently he broke out in a piping voice:

"Sam Simpson, yer can't shield that young feller; he's got to (hic) hang, and don't you forget it. I'm goin' now an' don' want no more of yer hos-p-p-pistolality." And bringing his hand down on an imaginary table he lost his equilibrium and fell headforemost on Tim, who was sleeping soundly with his head on the window-sill.

"All right," said the old toper, "gimme time, an' I'll go 'long peaceably."

Bob made a wild effort to hang to Tim, but not being able to keep his hold, slid down the floor.

"Thought you were going, Bob," said Sam.

"So I am—to sleep," and stretching out at full length, he was soon there.

Sam blew out the light, took off his coat and rolling it in a bundle placed it on the instrument table for a pillow; then laying himself down with his head on the coat and his feet extending beyond the table and resting on Tim's shoulders, in a few minutes he was snoring as loudly as the others.

At break of day the three men still retained their

positions, nor did they manifest any intention of rising. The nasal music which had swelled the midnight air was still kept up to such an extent that it seemed as if each was doing his best and loudest to herald the coming of the god of day.

Old Sol soon commenced his ascent of the sky, and his warm rays ere long began to heat the bald cranium of Tim Fangle as it lay in the window, a fair target for the sun's beams. Suddenly Tim assumed an upright sitting posture, throwing, by his movement, Sam's legs off the table, causing the befuddled operator to follow and alight squarely on top of Bob, who was stretched out below. The two men clinched and rolled over and over on the floor, punching and scratching each other the while, having, as is generally the case with half drunken men, no knowledge of why they were fighting.

Tim viewed with dismay the result of his early rising, and yelled at the combatants with a loud voice to cease; they, however, paid no attention to him, and it is difficult to imagine how the contest would have ended had he not, with remarkable presence of mind, grabbed up a half-filled bottle and placed it between the noses of the struggling men; this seemed to have a soothing effect, for each relaxed his hold on the other, and as Sam, with his accustomed politeness, turned the bottle over to Bob, they arose to their feet, torn, bruised and bleeding.

A drink all around, followed by explanations and handshakings, put the warriors on their former amicable terms, and the trio left the depot in search of breakfast.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO LETTERS.

On the Monday following Jo's departure the Professor received two letters, one from Elk Falls and the other bearing the postmark of an obscure town on the Mississippi. He opened the latter first, knowing it to be from Jo, but on glancing over it concluded to read it to the family. He placed this letter in his pocket, and as he walked homeward read the other, which was from Sallie Garnet's father. This conveyed the startling intelligence that that young lady had eloped on Wednesday night with Mr. Richard Buskin, from Hydefield, where she had been visiting her grand parents.

The old man was astonished and angered beyond expression at this information; could he have laid hold of Buskin then, that elegant gentleman would undoubtedly have regretted ever having met Miss Garnet.

As the Professor approached the tavern he saw his wife, her sister and Nettie seated on the veranda. He sighed as he thought of the effect this blow would have upon them, and would gladly have

parted with all he possessed could he have spared his wife and daughter the pain it would cause.

"Where's that from, Jake?" asked Miss Stubbs as the old man entered the gate with the letter in his hand.

"Elk Falls."

"Is Martha's baby dead? I told that woman to tie red flannel 'round that child's throat. But land sakes alive! you might as well talk to a Fiji islander! When is the funeral?"

"Pshaw, Becky! You always anticipate everything. Martha's baby is not dead, but Sallie has eloped!"

"Sallie eloped!" exclaimed the three ladies.

"Eloped!" continued Miss Stubbs, "and with a *man?*"

"Wife," said the Professor gravely, "it grieves me deeply to tell you this; but this letter from John Garnet says that Sallie has eloped with that scoundrel, Buskin!"

"With Mr. Buskin!" exclaimed Aunt Becky, being the only one who had not guessed this part of the occurrence. "Well, I never! When did they leave?"

"Wednesday night," answered the Professor.

"Yes—the very night your little robber boy left here. Oh, they had it all cut and dried; and it wouldn't surprise me to hear they were all together now, and that the boy had run off with some other girl."

"Fortunately, Becky, I am able to contradict you

there," said Mr. Matthews, suddenly thinking of Jo's letter, "for I have just received a letter from Jo, and will now read it to all of you."

"Does he deny it, Jacob?" asked his wife.

"You shall see." And taking the letter from his pocket, the Professor read as follows:

ON BOARD THE STEAMER GRAY EAGLE,
June 15, 187—.

MY KIND FRIEND: Feeling that an explanation of the occurrence which took place on the night of my leaving Ardrey is due to you and the members of your family who have been interested in my welfare, and, if possible, to ease in a measure my aching heart, I write you this letter. I do not ask you to excuse my crime, but merely wish you to understand the causes which led to so unfortunate a result. It is useless for me to remark upon the ill-feeling that had existed between Mr. Ward and myself; all of this is well known to you.

On the night of my departure, having placed my valise on the train, I returned to the office for the purpose of saying "good-bye" to Mr. Ward. I told him, as I had all along intended to, that had he made it less unpleasant for me, my stay in Ardrey would have been prolonged. He replied in his usual irritable, overbearing manner, and I responded rather hotly. Each succeeding remark was made with more emphasis, till finally he made a contemptible observation which I would rather not repeat; this so angered me that, not being able to restrain myself, I struck him with all the force I could command, and he fell over against the safe. The train at this moment started and I was obliged to run; not that I feared him; not that I thought

the result would be other than that from an ordinary blow, but simply to make the train, which I barely succeeded in doing by jumping on the rear platform of the last car; a moment more and I regretted not having remained, but then it was too late. I reached Fowler Junction early the next morning and there decided to take the train for Norvelle instead of going on to Darden as I had intended. This change was made at the instance of a chance acquaintance on the train, who, being a resident of St. Louis, had advised me to go there instead of Chicago. I reached Norvelle in the evening, and you can judge of my astonishment and horror when I read in an evening paper a special telegram from Darden giving an account of the death of Mr. Ward, and charging me with having been the cause of it. I was in a maze, and hardly knowing what I did, wandered around until I came to the levee just as this boat was pulling out. I reached it, leaving my valise behind me. I am now bound for St. Louis. I will get there before you receive this, but will not remain there; the farther I go, the safer I shall feel, and under an assumed name, I hope I may never be molested while my mother lives. The prison itself I do not dread so much; but the knowledge that my being in one, charged with a terrible crime, would bring the gray hairs of a fond mother to a premature grave, is, I think, sufficient excuse for this action. Now, my dear friend, though I never expect to see you again, I am bowed in grief at the thought of having done that which can only cause you to abhor and utterly detest me; but though I do not ask you to exculpate me, I submit, in palliation of my crime, that I could not possibly have foreseen that any blow I could give would have sent a person against the safe with force enough to produce death.

Perhaps the most trying part of this ordeal is,

that I must resign whatever aspirations I may have had concerning my future. Once, it looked so bright and full of joyous promise—now, naught but darkness and despair. But even in the lowest depths of my misery I will always hold in grateful remembrance your past kindness to me, and that Heaven will bless and protect you and yours will ever be the prayer of

Your unfortunate friend, Jo.

The silence which followed the conclusion of this letter was only broken by the low sobs of Nettie. Even Miss Stubbs could not say a word, and as she observed Mrs. Matthews raise a handkerchief to her eyes, she turned her head to hide the one solitary tear that trickled down her own sallow cheek.

"Poor Jo," said the Professor, at length. "It's terrible to see a young life like his blighted in this manner. He has a heavy load to carry. How I pity him. I don't think him so much to blame after all; but I would like to know what it was that Ward said."

"I hope they will never catch him," said Mrs. Matthews. "It's just as he says; if he was to be arrested, it would break his mother's heart if she feels toward him as a mother should."

"That's very true," remarked the Professor. "The boy fears nothing for himself. Well, well, it's a sad time for all of us. Becky, where do you think Sallie is?"

"Dear knows, though I expect she'll be home inside of a month."

Towards evening Miss Stubbs concluded that she wanted to do some shopping, and donning her new alpacca dress and last summer's bonnet, she took her portmonnaie in her hand and walked forth. Picking her way daintily along the road, skipping gaily across mud-puddles and girlishly tripping up and down on the irregular plank sidewalks, she soon found herself at the door of the store. Entering, she smiled sweetly upon Will Newins, who was lazily lolling on the counter, and who quickly bounced off behind it when Miss Stubbs' triangular visage appeared before him. In a short time Newins had about all the goods of the establishment spread out before the critical gaze of the old maid, who propounded her questions concerning quality, price, etc., around, between and over bolts of calico stacked up promiscuously on the counter.

"This is a very pretty figure, Mr. Newings," she remarked, peering at him through an opening in the bundles of cloth, while she laid a piece of calico on her left hand and smoothed it with her right.

"You think so?" said Newins, craning his neck around the pile in order to see the piece Miss Becky had reference to. "Ah, yes—that is a *very* pretty figure. My sister in Chicago sent me the sample of that, saying she had a dress of the same material and it was very becoming. She is just nineteen, you know; it is admirably suited to girls of her age. It will suit your complexion perfectly, also; I'd advise you to take it."

The slight reference made by Newins to her age

pleased the old maid very much, and she at once ordered enough calico for a dress, never inquiring the price until the piece had been cut off the bolt.

"How much is this?" she then asked.

"The price is fifteen cents per yard; but," he added confidentially, in a low tone, and leaning over the counter, "I'll make it to you at fourteen."

"Thank you, Mr. Newings. Please wrop it up for me. They don't hear anything from that boy, Travis, do they?" she asked, as Newins handed her the calico done up in a newspaper.

"Not that I've heard of, Miss Stubbs. I suppose he is far away now."

"Yes, I think so. The Professor had a letter from him this morning, and he said he was going to change his name."

"Why, you surprise me, Miss Stubbs. Did he say anything about—about the—the sad affair?"

"Oh, yes," replied Miss Becky, with a heavy sigh, "he owned up to it, but said he didn't think the blow would have had such an effect."

"May be not. What does the Professor think of it?"

"Well, Mr. Newings, it's this way," and Miss Becky dropped her voice and poked her sharp nose closer to the stack of goods. "*I* say that boy had a weepon; the Professor says not, but says if he did that he deserves to be put in the penitentiary. If he *didn't* have any weepon, Jake thinks he ain't a bit to blame."

"Ah! And Miss Nettie?"

"Well, sir, I have no patience with that hussy. She's jest a sighin' and cryin' and talkin' about dyin' all the time. I vum, if she was *my* child I'd give her a good shakin'!"

"I suppose it hurts her pride to think of what Jo has done."

"Pride! She ain't got no pride at all—the idea of that chit of a girl having any! No, sir, it ain't her pride; for talk as much as I can about that boy, she won't believe he done it."

"She thinks him innocent?"

"Indeed she does, and won't hear to nothin' else. Now, this mornin' Jake he brought home a letter that said Mr. Buskin had run off with Sallie Garnet the same night that boy left, and I jest declare I think that boy is with them."

"Oh, I hardly think that, Miss Stubbs."

"I don't know why you shouldn't; they all left the same night, and that boy was pretty sneakin'. But it's getting late and I must be going; you must come down and see us, Mr. Newings." And Miss Stubbs ducked her head, executing what she considered a graceful bow, and affectionately tucking the bundle in the hollow of her left arm, sailed majestically out the door.

"Well," mused Newins, as he put the bolts of calico back on the shelves, "she's the most unreasonablest girl I ever heard of; but some folks won't believe nothin' about anybody they like."

The next ten days passed by without anything occurring worthy of note. At the end of that time

the Professor received a call from Captain Brooks, who stated that a valise bearing Jo Travis' name, had been sent him from Norvelle, and upon opening it, he found articles of clothing, brushes, etc., that he had no doubt was the property of Jo, but he had also found, tucked away in a little pocket, a very fine gold watch, that he was certain never belonged to the boy.

"Have you the watch with you?" asked the Professor.

"Yes; here it is," and Brooks handed him a large, gold hunting case watch.

"I never saw this before," said Matthews, after he had examined it. "I am certain Jo never carried it. What do you think about it?"

"I had much rather not say, Professor, until I receive some confirmation of my theory. Perhaps George Kerr can tell us who it belongs to. Let's walk up there."

George Kerr kept a small jewelry repair shop in a front corner of the dry goods store. As Matthews and Brooks entered and engaged in conversation with Kerr, Will Newins walked carelessly up to them with his hands in his pockets.

"Kerr," said Brooks, handing the watch over to the jeweler, "do you know this watch?"

"Yes," replied Kerr, taking it in his hand, "I know it very well. It was Mr. Ward's. I repaired it for him the day he was killed.

Brooks looked at the Professor as if to say this was what he had expected. The old man's face

wore a troubled look as he leaned over the little counter, and spoke to the jeweler.

"You are certain of what you say, Mr. Kerr?"

"Perfectly; I have repaired the watch time and again."

"Did you return it to Mr. Ward after you had fixed it?"

"Yes, sir, I took it over to him myself that same night."

"About what time?"

"Well, it was a few minutes before train time, as the train was just coming in as I left there."

Matthews went to the door, followed by Brooks.

"What do you think about it, Professor?"

"Nothing."

CHAPTER XII.

THE LONE STAR STATE.

Texas! That lone, bright star of the Southwest, whose gladsome rays cheer the hearts of those who dwell in distant climes and attracts them to its wide domain. The land whose broad area embraces boundless prairies, limpid streams, and grand, majestic forests; whose rich, diversified soil clothes and feeds the industrious man and fills his purse with gold; whose balmy breezes, entrancing moonlights and mild, equable climate, combine to make it one of the brightest and most attractive spots upon the face of the globe.

Near the close of a hot July day, a passenger train was bowling along over one of the principal roads in Texas, rapidly approaching the new town of Millwood. The sun, which all day long had beaten down with the utmost severity upon the train as it sped across the prairies, was now slowly sinking towards the western horizon, and its warm, penetrating rays blazed fiercely through every window, being but poorly obstructed by the drawn blinds.

In the rear coach, on what should have been the shady side, occupying a whole seat, reclined a young man, gazing sadly out the window over the broad, level expanse presented to him. His head rested despondently on his hand, which now and then twitched nervously as if some painful thought had crossed the threshhold of his mind, while a worn, haggard look upon his countenance told too well a tale of mental anguish and suffering.

At length the whistle sounded, the brakeman announced "Millwood," and the young man with a sigh of relief, arose and put on his coat and hat.

As a passenger near by makes some jocular remark concerning the little station, the young man smiles and gives a pleasant response. Then do we recognize our friend Jo Travis; but how changed! The genial, frank expression that had always won him friends, was now replaced by a worried, anxious look, that one would never have expected to see in the countenance of our hero.

As the train stopped, the boy jumped to the platform and walked into the depot.

"Is Mr. Jackson in?" he asked of a pleasant faced gentleman who was bustling around inside the office.

"That's me, sir," replied the man, cheerily, "what can I do for you?"

"I am sent here as operator," said Jo.

"Oh, you are, are you?" Well, I'm glad of it, for you look like a good fellow. Come inside. Where are you from?"

"New York State," replied Jo, as he entered the office.

"York State, eh? What's your name?"

"Harris."

"Harris. All right. What was your name before you came to Texas? Oh, you needn't mind," he continued, as Jo colored and looked embarrassed, "we always ask a new-comer that as a sort of joke, but sometimes we strike 'em right. What's your first name?"

"Jo."

"And mine is Bert. Either that or plain Jackson, but never *Mister*. Now, Jo, there's your table over there in the corner. We haven't had time to cut in to-day."

Jo went to the table, cut in the instruments, and in a short time the sounder was clicking out a pleasant song.

Jackson watched Jo as he manipulated the keys in sending a telegram, and evidently came to the conclusion that he had a pretty good operator.

"Reckon you're a little dusty, ain't you?" he asked, coming up to Jo's table.

"Yes, sir; it's a rather hot and dusty ride."

"Hallo-o Julius!" yelled the agent through the window at a big, broad-shouldered darkey, who was lounging lazily on the cotton wharf. "Come here and fix up a bath. Now Julius," as the negro entered the depot, "this gentleman is Mr. Jo Harris, and he's another of your bosses; fill up the tub for him."

Julius hastened into the warehouse and Mr. Jackson, turning to his operator, remarked:

"This is a young town and lodgings are scarce; we all sleep in the office—that is, my two clerks and myself; they have that bed, while I occupy this; you may have half of it, if you like."

"Thank you—you are very kind," replied Jo, who had not expected to find such hospitality in Texas.

Julius at that moment announced the bath was ready, and the travel-stained boy was soon enjoying it. As it was late when he finished, he immediately went to bed, feeling considerably refreshed and a great deal better mentally than he had felt since leaving Norvelle.

The next day all hands were up early and the agent, his two clerks and Jo started over to their boarding-house. Jackson explained that on account of the newness of the town there were at present no hotels, and folks were obliged to take anything they could get.

"Now, this man means well," he said, "but he thinks we ought to like just what he does, and he gives us navy beans twice a day with side meat as trimmings."

They reached the house, which was mainly built of logs, with a box front addition. The proprietor of the mansion was leaning against the gate-post busily engaged in whittling a small piece of pine wood with a large-bladed knife.

"Morn', Mr. Jackson," he drawled out as the agent advanced with Jo.

"Good morning, Mr. Leathers," responded Jackson, heartily; "how do you come on this morning?"

"Only tol'ble, Mr. Jackson, only tol'ble; 'fraid I'm goin' to chillin' ag'in—me an' the ole woman havin' a hard time of it."

"Is she chilling, too?"

"Wall, no; she's right peart, but I'm 'feard she's workin' too hard a-keepin' boarders."

"No, I reckon not," said Jackson; "but let me introduce you to a new boarder. Jo, this is Mr. Leathers."

Mr. Leathers took Jo's proffered hand, and raising it to a level with his chin, brought it down to arms' length with a jerk that wrenched the boy's shoulder, then released it.

"You're from the North, I reckon?"

"Yes—New York."

"I 'lowed you come from the North; I can tell 'em every pop. Mornin, men," to the two clerks who at that moment reached the gate. "Walk out to breakfast." And Leathers shuffled up to the house followed by the depot men.

Inside, a large pine table, set without a cloth, and half a dozen raw-hide bottom chairs were all that attracted Jo. Leathers motioned all to be seated, and disappeared through the back door, returning presently bearing a large coffee-pot in one hand and a dish of fried bacon in the other. His wife followed him with corn dodgers and rice.

Mrs. Leathers was the possessor of a sour face and a cross-eye. Turning the former to Jo and the

latter towards Jackson, who was seated at the foot of the table with Jo on his right, she asked:

"Will you have sugar and milk in your coffee?"

The boy looked up, but seeing her eye beaming kindly upon the agent, said nothing.

"*You*, I'm talkin' to," she said in a shrill voice, nodding her head at Jo. "Will you have sugar and milk?"

"Yes'm, if you please," replied Jo, politely.

"Well, we hain't 'em, stranger," said the old woman, handing a cup of black coffee to the lad.

"No," said Leathers, apologetically, "they don't ary one of us care for them fixin's, so we don't allers keep 'em on hand."

Jackson and his clerks could hardly keep from laughing at Jo's disappointment, but one glance at Mrs. Leathers was enough to cause all feelings of hilarity to subside at once.

The new boarder did not appear to take kindly to the fare. He took a mouthful of the corn dodger, but with difficulty swallowed it; he tried the coffee once, and made no further attempt in that direction; he then made an onslaught on the rice, but having neither sugar nor butter, concluded he had had enough breakfast.

"Mr. Davis," said Leathers, addressing one of the clerks, "pass that fry."

Mr. Davis did as requested, and Leathers handed a plate containing a few pieces of bacon, swimming in grease, to Jo.

"Here, New York, put some of this gravy on your rice."

The boy did so and returned the plate to Leathers, who presented it to his wife.

"Have some fry, Sairy?"

"No, Mr. Leathers, I wouldn't choose any," replied Sairy, rising. "You men can eat away—I've got work to do." And going to a shelf she took down a snuff bottle, and wobbling a stick around in it awhile, put the stick, with a ball of snuff adhering to it, in her mouth, and vanished through the kitchen door.

Jackson and his party arose and left the house, leaving Leathers seated at the table.

"How do you like our hotel?" Davis asked Jo on their way back to the depot.

"It possesses the charm of novelty, at least; but don't folks in this country use sugar and milk?"

"Yes; but his kind seldom do. We couldn't do any better though, and actually had to beg him to take us."

"Don't you ever get any other meat than bacon?"

"Oh, yes, we have a chicken occasionally. Reckon we'll have one for dinner, as I saw one lariated out in the yard."

"One chicken won't go far with this crowd."

"Mrs. Leathers will make it do."

"You are not a native Texan, are you?" asked Jo, presently.

"No, I'm from Pennsylvania; I used to be an operator, and drifted down here some years ago. Jackson and Palmer, the other clerk, are Texans born and raised, and they are both splendid fellows."

"So I judge. I think Mr. Jackson especially a good, clever man."

"He's all that, and no man ever lived who would do more for his friends. He never forgets an enemy either, and will fight at the drop of a hat."

"Oh, yes, I've always heard Texans were great fighters and would kill a man for a dollar."

"Of course—you can hear anything up North. I've been in this State four or five years, but I've always behaved myself and have never had any trouble."

"Then you think if a man attends to his own business he's as safe here as anywhere?"

"Certainly he is. On the other hand, if he mixes up in other people's affairs he's liable to regret it—provided, of course, that he has time. There are, probably, a great many people in this State whose business will not admit of any outside interference, and there are some who come from the old States to keep out of the clutches of the law. This kind want to be let alone, and as long as you do that you're all right."

Jack Davis and Jo became fast friends. Jack was some seven or eight years Jo's senior, had been all over Texas, and gave the boy a great deal of information concerning the State; he was a harum-scarum sort of a fellow, caring nothing for money except for his immediate wants, taking his toddy occasionally, but never getting intoxicated, and was the friend of all the railroad boys from one end of the road to the other.

The town of Millwood was about a mile from the depot; it was the county seat, and at this time consisted of about twenty dwellings and a half dozen business houses; these were clustered around a not very imposing court-house, forming "the square." Like all other Texas towns, it had its "natural advantages," and was slowly but surely advancing to the front rank of important cities. The people, Jo found open-hearted and hospitable; in fact, he had not been there a week before he knew everybody, liked them all and counted them his friends. Although hailing from a "Yankee" State, he found the hands of the Millwood folks extended to him as freely, and his own grasped as cordially by them as if he had been a true born Southerner.

As the town was growing fast, he and his associates at the depot before long managed to secure a good boarding-house, and Jo rapidly regained his wonted cheerfulness.

One day, seated at his instrument table, which was placed between two windows, he heard a voice call out:

"Say, Mister!"

Looking over the paper he was perusing, he saw, leaning in over the window-sill, a tall, raw-boned, smooth-faced man with long sandy hair, surmounted by a wide-brimmed light felt hat with a brass cord around it; he had a red and yellow handkerchief around his neck, and wore a gray woollen shirt. Jo could only conjecture what composed the remainder of his costume, as it was not in view.

"Well, sir?" he said, interrogatively.

"Aire you sendin' off a despatch now?"

"No, sir," and Jo pretended to read, well knowing other questions would follow.

The sounder was clicking cheerily, and the man regarded the instruments attentively, evidently wondering which one made the noise and what caused it.

"Aire you takin' off a despatch now?" he at length asked.

"No, sir."

Then after a few moments reflection:

"Ye ain't doin' nothin' to it, aire yer?"

"Not at present," replied Jo.

The stranger looked all over, under and around the table, but not comprehending the mystery, remarked, as he turned away:

"Well, a man might study jogerfy all his life, 'fore he'd be able to organize that 'ere."

Off he shambled, his huge spurs clanging a lively accompaniment at every step; reaching his pony, which had been standing near, he gathered up the rein, gave a glance at Jo, who was watching him from the window, vaulted lightly into the saddle, and with a "Who-o-p-e-e," galloped down the road, his left hand holding the rein loosely, while with his right he swung a quirt over his head.

"What do you think of that fellow, Jo?" asked Jackson.

"He has an ugly appearance, though I suppose he's not as bad as he looks."

"You can't tell about that; he might be one of

the wild and woolly, hard-to-curry sort. The fact is, you never know how to take these cowboys; get a little whisky in them, and they are regular devils."

"I don't know as they differ in that respect from other people," said Jo. "I believe whisky changes the nature of every man who drinks it to excess."

"Perhaps it does; but these fellows get a villainous quality of tanglefoot, and after they are filled up they generally let in to shooting, if any body hurts their feelings."

"That, I suppose," said Jo, "is the difference between old States and new ones; back East if we have a difficulty it is settled by one man knocking the other down with his fist; here you blow each other's brains out."

"Look here, my friend," said Jackson, earnestly, "if a man were to insult you, what would you do?"

"Knock him down if I could."

"Then I must say your education has been sadly neglected, and if you ever have occasion to resent an insult in this country, I'd advise you to adopt some more effective means. A man's fist stands no show against a six-shooter."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DESERTED WIFE.

Millwood boomed. Handsome buildings were erected, banks were started, a line of street railroad was established, foreign capital sought investment in the sprightly little town, and in a year from the time Jo first made his appearance there, it had grown to the dignity of a city, with a mayor and full complement of councilmen. As the little city continued to thrive, Jo's keen foresight showed him the direction in which its affairs would drift, and seizing the tide at its flood, was carried onward with it until he found himself high and dry on prosperity's beach, the possessor of a snug little income—the result of a few small investments.

Hundreds of operators have been in Texas since that time, and most of them have had as good opportunities as our friend Jo had; yet the money they made was squandered recklessly, and never a dollar saved. Finally, becoming disgusted and blaming Texas for their own short-sightedness, they would leave the State, poor in purse, sick at heart, and overflowing with regrets at ever having been so foolish as to enter it.

Millwood got along so well that finally the demand for an up-town telegraph office was so great that one was opened, and Jo placed in charge.

His relations among the boys at the depot and along the line had been very pleasant, and it was with the greatest reluctance he consented to the change; he, however, easily prevailed upon his bosom friend, Jack Davis, who was now operator at the depot and attended to the sale of tickets, to room with him.

Jo had a cozy office fitted up in the second story of a brick building and also furnished a room which opened into the office, as a sleeping apartment; here he and Davis roomed, and often, after the office had been closed for the night, the two friends would sit, smoke and talk until midnight.

One afternoon as Jo approached the counter in response to a timid feminine knock, he was overwhelmed with surprise to see standing before him the Sallie Garnet he had met years before at Professor Matthews' house. His first impulse was to accost her as an old acquaintance, but he checked himself in time. He saw at once that she did not recognize him, and after a few hurried but plaintive questions concerning the quickest means to employ in getting money from Elk Falls, she begged him to write a despatch for her, as she was too nervous to write it herself.

"And please get it as short as possible," she added.

Jo took a pencil and blank and asked the excited lady to whom she wished the telegram addressed.

"To Mr. John Garnet, Elk Falls. Tell him my husband has left me without any money, and to send me seventy-five dollars at once, so that I can start home to-night."

"That will cost a good deal, Madame."

"Then please shorten it; I have but very little money."

Jo then wrote the following message, which she signed and paid for:

MILLWOOD, TEXAS, May 18, 187—

JOHN GARNET, Elk Falls:

Am deserted; no money; telegraph seventy-five dollars, expenses home. SALLIE.

10 paid.

"Where will you be found when the answer comes?" asked Jo.

"At the Millwood House."

"What is your full name, please?"

"Mrs. Sarah Buskin."

"Buskin!" echoed Jo, in open-mouthed astonishment; "did you marry *him?*"

"I did," she replied in a quiet, dignified manner, which contrasted strangely with her previous excited demeanor. "Is there anything surprising in that? Do you know my husband?"

"Yes—that is, I have met him," he answered, abstractedly. He was thinking of the night the raid was made upon the old log hut, and how this same girl had championed Buskin during that gentleman's absence.

"Perhaps this is not the same gentleman. But I have seen you somewhere before, sir," looking closely at Jo, who colored deeply; "were you never in Elk Falls?"

Jo was plainly very ill at ease, but assuming an indifferent look, replied in the negative.

"Ah, sir, Texas is a great country; there are always people coming here who would like to forget certain events in their lives."

That Mrs. Buskin suspected something, was very apparent, and Jo felt that all was lost. He, however, answered with assumed carelessness:

"No doubt you are correct, Madame; but you should not judge the many by the few."

"Certainly not. Now, will that go right away?"

"Oh, yes, in a very few minutes."

"And when will I get the money?"

Jo could scarcely repress a smile at this often asked question, but he resorted to the best known tactics, and replied:

"Well, you *should* get it by to-morrow morning at least, but it is possible you may hear from it before night, though you may not until to-morrow evening; I'll notify you when it comes."

"Thank you," and Mrs. Buskin left, having a very indistinct idea as to when she might look for her money.

Jo sent the message, then arose and walked the floor; though this occupation was healthy enough corporeally considered, it had a very depressing effect mentally, as it assisted him in brooding over

an old trouble which, though not forgotten, had yet been buried with the long ago and of late had given him no uneasiness. Mrs. Buskin's face, however, had resurrected the past, and the events of his young life at Ardrey now crowded through his mind.

"Must I," he asked himself, "move on further? This State is opening up, the city is growing and will soon be the leading one of this section, and the chances of my being discovered greatly augmented. Mrs. Buskin did not recognize me, but when she thinks a while she will be able to locate me; *then* what am I to expect?"

Jack Davis at this moment entered the office.

"Hello, Jo!" he exclaimed, noting his friend's agitation. "What's the racket now? You look all broke up!"

"So I am, Jack; completely so. I'm afraid I must leave Millwood."

"Leave Millwood? What for? Don't you give satisfaction to the company? Or are they going to send you somewhere else?"

"No, I'm simply getting tired of it."

"That won't do, Jo. I know better. There's no danger of your getting tired of a place where you have as many friends as you have here. Besides, you are doing too well to leave of your own accord; and finally, you wouldn't do a thing voluntarily that would break you up like this. Now, what is it?"

Jo sat on the wide window-sill and gazed thoughtfully down the street, but said nothing.

"Come, Jo," said Davis, perching himself on the

back of a chair, "there's some funny business about this; of course I don't want to pry into your secrets, but I'm going to do what I can to keep you here."

"No, Jack, I know it's best for me to leave, but I'd rather not say why."

"I'll bet, though, that the same thing that brought you to Texas is taking you away from Millwood."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't mean to say anything against you, Jo, but you know when you first came here you used to be moping around all the time, and at first wasn't at all lively with the boys, but kept entirely to yourself; this, of course, occasioned talk, and I heard a good deal of it; I generally shut 'em up, though, because I thought you would come around all right, and I liked you from the start."

"You're a good fellow, Jack, and I'll regret leaving you more than all the rest."

"Then why don't you stay?"

"Jack," replied Jo, impulsively, "I'll tell you, but you will be the first person I ever spoke to concerning the matter."

"I shall be perfectly mum, and will appreciate your confidence, and if my advice or assistance will be worth anything, you may count on both."

Jo gave his friend's hand a grateful pressure and began his story.

Business had been unusually dull that day, and he was enabled to get through with but few interruptions.

"Jo," said Davis when his friend had finished, "I'm glad you have told me this."

"So am I, Jack; I feel relieved."

"Glad to hear it. Now, *don't* do anything rash, but just wait a day or two before taking any decisive step; there's no hurry, and in the meantime something may turn up."

"No, no, Jack; nothing can turn up that will help me. All I have to do is to steer clear of former acquaintances."

"You don't know; some day you may be glad to see them," remarked Jack, as he left the office and entered his room.

The wires seemed to have interested themselves in Mrs. Buskin's behalf that afternoon, for shortly after five o'clock Jo received a "transfer" of seventy-five dollars in her favor. He at once despatched his messenger to the hotel, and in less than half an hour Mrs. Buskin entered the office.

"I am so much relieved," she said; "I have been in dreadful suspense for fear they would not send it. Do I sign here?" designating with the pen a page on the book Jo had given her.

"Yes, if you please; on the lower line—your full name."

Mrs. Buskin nibbled the end of her pen-holder as she read over the document she was required to sign.

"'Received of the Western Union Telegraph Company, per J. T. Harris, manager——' are *you* Mr. Harris?"

"Yes'm," replied Jo, rather nervously.

The receipt was signed and the money paid to the lady, who counted it over carefully.

"Thank heaven!" she at length exclaimed, with a sigh of relief. "Now I can get home. Mr. Harris, after I went to the hotel this afternoon I tried to place you, and at last concluded I had met you at Ardrey—but," she added, in a lower tone and with a glance at the receipt she had signed, "under another name."

Jo felt a strange feeling creep over him. He imagined himself tracked, discovered and exposed. He almost fancied he heard the footsteps of the officers in the hall. Quickly and vividly rose before his vision the manacles, the trial and the felon's lonely cell. Shaking off this lethargy, he replied to Mrs. Buskin, in an excited tone that very much surprised her:

"I am glad, Miss Sallie," he said, thinking of her only as he used to know her, "that you have recognized me. This sailing under false colors is repugnant and burdensome, and rather than live this way all my life, I shall go back to Ardrey and stand my trial."

"Your trial! For what?"

"Is it possible you have not heard?"

"Why, surely I have not heard of anything you have done."

"It is natural that my misfortunes should appear large to myself, though nothing to other people," Jo remarked, more calmly, "and that I should imagine everybody interested in what alone concerns me. Yet it is strange you should not have heard. When did you leave Elk Falls?"

"Ah, never can I forget the time I left the home of a loving, doting father and an invalid mother, whose only desire was to see me happy, and fled, against their wishes, with a man who has cruelly deserted me. Oh, what a life has been mine since leaving that dear home four years ago!"

"Four years? I left Ardrey four years ago the thirteenth of June."

"That's the very night we left Hydefield. I had been there visiting relatives. We rode to Spankton that night, stopping at the house of a friend of Mr. Buskin's in Ardrey, about two hours, while Mr. Buskin went back to the depot to transact some business. While he was gone, I repented of my rashness and determined to go to Uncle Jake's, but found the door of my room was locked on the outside. I had almost made up my mind to go out the window when Mr. Buskin returned; then of course I was willing to go ahead. Had I made my escape when I tried, much misery would have been spared me, and perhaps my poor mother would now be living. The only word I have had from home since I left, is that my action hastened her death."

The poor woman bowed her head on the counter and sobbed like a child. Jo was deeply moved, and in her troubles forgot his own. He spoke to her sympathizingly and begged her not to be cast down by this misfortune. She thanked him for his comforting words, and drying her eyes, bade him good-bye and left the office.

As she descended the stairs to the street, she was overtaken by Jack, who said:

"Excuse me, Madame, but I am a cousin to Jo—Mr. Harris. As I was in the room next the office, I overheard your conversation. After assuring you of my deep sympathy for yourself, I wish to say that he neglected to make a slight request of you."

"Indeed; what was it?"

"That you say nothing about having met him here; he's only going *incog.* until things can be straightened around a little. You will do this much for him?"

"Certainly; but what did he do?"

"Nothing at all. He is *suspected* of having severely injured a man; but, bless you! he is no more guilty than you are."

"I sincerely hope he will come out all right," remarked Mrs. Buskin, as she stopped at the ladies' entrance of the hotel. "This is my hotel, Mr. ——"

"Oh, pardon me—Davis, Jack Davis, at your service," and he handed her a card. "It's queer you didn't hear of Jo's trouble; but I believe you said you left that country about the time he did?"

"Yes, sir; I left Hydefield on the thirteenth of June four years ago."

"What time did you leave Ardrey?"

"About midnight."

"That was an hour after Jo had left; seems like you ought to have heard of it."

"There were but few people at the depot; we rode by there and over to the house of a friend. But excuse me, Mr. Davis, I must go. Good evening." And she tripped lightly up the hotel stairs, while Jack hastened back to the office.

CHAHTER XIV.

SIDE-TRACKED AGAIN.

The next morning Mrs. Buskin's pale, sad face was presented at the little ticket window, and as Jack handed her a coupon ticket neatly folded and tucked in a little white envelope, he endeavored to resume the conversation so abruptly broken off the previous day at the hotel entrance. Mrs. Buskin, however, was indisposed to talk further upon a subject which was plainly painful to her, and as Jack noticed the appeal in her wonderfully expressive eyes, he relinquished the attempt, and like the real good fellow he was, tried his best to divert her thoughts from the channel of grief into which they had drifted. Then, as the train rolled up to the station, with characteristic gallantry he flew out the office door, assisted Mrs. Buskin on the train, and after a short but triumphant squabble with the uniformed sleeping-car conductor, managed to obtain for her a whole section in the center of the car; this kindness was acknowledged by her giving Jack her hand and expressing the hope that if he ever happened near Elk Falls, he would not fail to call and see her.

Jack blushed as the dainty little hand endeavored to give his broad palm a tiny pressure, and stammering out his thanks for the invitation, tipped his hat awkwardly and jumped from the train just as it started.

About a month after Mrs. Buskin's departure from Millwood, Jo, while taking "noon press," received the following item:

SPRINGFIELD, Mo., June 15, 18—.

The particulars have just reached here of a descent made last week upon a gang of counterfeiters in Barry County, by Deputy United States Marshal Armstrong, assisted by the sheriff of the county and *posse*. The attack had been well planned, and resulted in the death of Dick Buskin, the leader, and the capture of two others of the gang. Pete Carter, the remaining member, escaped, but as there is a large reward offered for his apprehension it is confidently predicted that he will soon be captured. This gang has been operating extensively in different Western States for five years or more, and until now all efforts to break it up have been fruitless.

Jo rarely became "rattled" when receiving press or anything else from the fastest senders, but it will have to be confessed that he was rattled very much before the end of the foregoing item was reached; he managed to put it down in some shape, and after the report was finished, started out to hunt up his friend Jack, whom he found at the Bank Exchange deeply immersed in a game of billiards.

"Your friend Dick leaves a mighty interesting

widow," was Jack's comment when Jo had told him the news. "I shouldn't mind setting up to her myself."

"I suppose this affair will break up the gang," observed Jo. "Pete Carter will now probably go back to railroading."

"Very likely, unless he has made his pile."

The two friends talked for half an hour longer when Jack suddenly noticed that it was near train time and he must be going. He and Jo therefore separated, the latter going back to the office, while Davis jumped on a passing street-car and was soon at the depot, where he found, as usual, a large crowd awaiting the arrival of train No. 1.

Here we will leave him and run down to Plumville, a little station about fifteen miles from Millwood.

In the smoking car of train No. 1, which was just pulling out, sat a rough but harmless looking man, fanning himself with the remnant of a straw hat which he held in one hand, while with the other he occasionally rubbed his chin, which was ornamented with a stubbly, bristling beard. His face, bloated and dirty, was admirably set off by a swollen, red-tipped nose and a wide, hungry-looking mouth, the corners of which were artistically decorated with tobacco juice. He wore a checked shirt, no collar, buttonless vest and cottonade pants, which were tucked into a pair of large, coarse boots. His bloodshot eyes cast frequent and nervous glances toward the forward door of the car, which presently opened

and "Tickets! Tickets!" reaching his ears, told him the time for action had arrived.

"Now, Roxy," he said, addressing himself, "brace up to him; he has a forbidding aspect, but don't weaken."

As the conductor approached, the passenger arose, and steadying himself against the seat, answered the official's demand for "ticket" with:

"Haven't got any, pardner. I'm an operator; never have use for a ticket or pass on this road."

"But you have use for one or the other on this train," said the conductor, "unless you put up your fare."

"I'm going to work at Millwood, pardner, and am flat broke; didn't have time to get a pass."

"You better walk back and get one then," suggested the conductor, reaching for the bell rope.

"Look here, you wouldn't put a fellow off in this wild country, would you, eh?"

"Certainly—if he wouldn't take the hint and put himself off," pulling on the rope.

"Say, conduc., s'pose'n you let me go on to Millwood and I'll pay you on your next trip?" asked the operator, as the train slowed up.

"I've had that same proposition made me four times already this trip, and rejected it each time."

"You'll get your reward in the next world," remarked the operator as he jumped from the train, "for it's dead certain you won't in this; they don't make superintendents out of your kind."

Our friend stood there on the prairie and gazed

wistfully at the receding train as it bounded along toward Millwood.

"Side-tracked again by Jiminy," he exclaimed. "But," he added, as he noticed the waving corn in a distant field," I can stand it as long as green corn and watermelons hold out."

It is, perhaps, needless to say that this is the same Sam Simpson whom we have known in a more northerly clime. Though several years have passed since we last saw him, he has changed but little in appearance or manner, and is now, as then, on the lookout for a drink or a job, giving the preference to the former.

"Well," said Sam, "this is about as rough a deal as I've had yet; nothing in sight; not even a hay-stack to crawl under. Reckon I better follow the train," and stepping on the track he set out in the direction of Millwood.

That evening as Jo sat in his office, Sam presented himself at the counter.

"Say, pard," he called out, "look here a minute."

Jo advanced to the counter, and despite the years which had passed since they last met, the recognition was mutual.

"Jo Travis, sure 'nuff!" exclaimed Sam, reaching his hand over the counter. "Put 'er there, old fel.; who'd a thunk it? You way down here in Texas!"

"Come in, Sam," said Jo, "but don't be so boisterous."

"Well, old pard, I'm mighty glad to see you," said Sam, entering the office. "It's a sight for sore eyes, *I* tell yer."

Sam seated himself and placed his feet on the table as though glad of this opportunity to rest them.

"How long have you been here?" he asked.

"Nearly four years."

"Four years! Then you must have cut for Texas just after you fixed——"

"Hush!" interrupted Jo. "Don't mention that."

"All serene," rejoined Sam, lowering his voice, "but did they never get on your track?"

"Never."

"You may thank me for not sending a message to catch you on the train. I went to Ardrey the next morning, and an old duffer there wanted you caught, but I took good care you were O. K. first."

"Sam, you're a good fellow, and I'm indeed grateful for your kindness. But, tell me—did you see the Professor that day? How did he take it?"

"Hard, pard, hard; different man altogether—tried to comfort him, but he was uncomfortable. Never believed you did it, though."

"Yes, I know it; he never will believe it, either. Ah, Sam, I can never look *him* in the face again."

"Well, blamed if I'd feel that way about it; 'twasn't so much your fault. But I don't think they ever made much effort to find you, Jo."

"They made one that you know of, Sam, and I acknowledge my indebtedness to you for——"

"Oh, that's nothing; you paid for it in advance by giving me many a square."

"You needn't count that; you are one of the

wards of the fraternity, you know. We always expect to throw away a certain amount annually on our less fortunate brethren."

"If that's the case, pardner, I'd like to draw a little in advance," remarked Simpson.

Jo laughed and handed Sam a little money, telling him that he could have more when that was gone. Sam's eyes sparkled as he gazed at the silver coin, and suddenly remembering that he had left a friend down-stairs, took his departure, saying he would be around in the morning.

The next morning Sam made his appearance at an early hour, tolerably sober.

"I'm glad you came, Sam," said Jo; "I've been wishing for you."

"Think of angels and you hear their wings rustle. I'm a rustler, and I flew to you. What's up?"

"We have a big procession here this morning, and as my company is going to parade, I'd like to join them? Will you stay here till I get back? I'll not be longer than two hours."

"I'm at your service and will be glad to accommodate you; but first I'm bound to give my landlord a dollar for lodging and breakfast—told him I'd be right back."

"You can wait till I return; then I'll give you money to pay him."

"Oh, no, couldn't. Told him I'd be back in twenty minutes; and besides, think he'll give me a job tending bar."

"I'd feel sorry for him if he did. Here's a dollar,

but be sure to come right back—I'm depending on you."

"I'll relieve you in seventeen minutes and a-half; get your uniform on and be ready to skip," replied Sam, as he took the money and left.

Jo donned his uniform and patiently awaited Sam's return.

Ten o'clock, and still he waited; the procession would start in an hour. Eleven o'clock, and no Sam. Presently the sound of martial music was heard, and Jo, with a feeling of disappointment, took a position at the window to witness the parade.

The last company in the long procession was the "Texas Guards," of which Jo was first lieutenant. His heart beat with pride as he saw the manly fellows marching with the precision of old veterans, and he could not help raising his hand and saluting them; this action was acknowledged by the company in a graceful movement and change of arms.

Following the "Guards" came a dray drawn by an antiquated mule and driven by an old Irishman who was puffing vigorously away at a corn-cob pipe. Standing upon the dray, with one hand resting upon the driver's shoulder and the other clasping something to his bosom, was the irrepressible Mr. Simpson.

Noticing the salute of the captain, he glanced up at the window, and seeing Jo, produced a bottle, which he held up at arm's length; then taking a swig therefrom, he resumed his former attitude, throwing back his head with an air of conscious dig-

nity, looking for all the world as if he was the honored guest of the occasion. Jo withdrew from the window in no pleasant frame of mind.

The following morning Sam entered the office, smiling sweetly upon Jo.

"Say, Jim," was his salutation, "can't you stake me for a square this morn'?"

"I suppose I ought to," replied Jo, sarcastically, "in consideration of your valuable services yesterday."

"Yes, I ran across an old-time friend; bowled him up and laid him out, and by that time I was just feeling healthy; took a barouche and drove around the suburbs."

"Yes, I saw you. You ought to be ashamed for making such a disgusting spectacle of yourself as you did yesterday."

"Now, there *you* go. I hear a heap of preaching considering I never go to church. But say, Jo, gimme a half—won't bother you no more this year—goin' to sail out to-morrow."

"No! I'll give you no more money; come around at noon and I'll fix you for dinner."

"Oh, *hang* your dinner. It's always 'give you something to eat.' I don't want it; besides, have to take an appetizer first. I want a bracer now, any way, 'cos I want to strike the despatcher for a job."

"You can't get a position unless you quit drinking," said Jo.

"Well, then," indignantly, "I'll quit the biz.; I'm not going to make a slave of myself for anybody,

and if they won't let me take a drink when I want it, I won't work for them; that's all."

"No, I wouldn't," replied Jo, rather staggered, "I'd have more pride than to work for any one who required me to keep sober; yet I'd make a slave of myself to a devil who requires me to beg money to get drunk on. Oh, Sam, I believe I'm getting disgusted with you."

"All right; that's your privilege," said Sam, as he opened the door and walked out into the hall. Leaving the door open, he walked down the hallway until he reached the head of the stairs; he then stopped, and turning half way around, said in a loud voice that reached Jo in the operating-room: "You seem to have forgotten that I ever was at Ardrey; you'll find out—"

Jo rushed into the hall, but Sam was gone. Down the stairs he bounded, but although he looked up and down the street and into several stores in the immediate vicinity, he saw no trace of Sam.

CHAPTER XV.

SAM MAKES A HAUL.

Jo was considerably agitated the next few weeks, and notwithstanding Davis' assurance that everything was all right, the young man could not help feeling that Sam Simpson would reveal his whereabouts to the authorities at Ardrey; his last words indicated that this had been his intention.

One day as Jo was engaged in writing a letter, Sam walked into the office, slapped him familiarly on the shoulder, extended his hand, and asked Jo if he was offended at him.

Jo replied that he was not, and the two shook hands.

"Well," said Sam, as he sat in a chair and let his feet hang out the window, "I was pretty mad when I left you, but a friend of yours caught on to me and done me up right."

"A friend of mine! Who was it?"

"His name was Davis."

"Jack Davis?"

"Reckon so. When I yelled at you from the hall he was just coming up-stairs, and he snaked me into that room there too quick."

"And that's why I didn't find you. What did he do then?"

"Why, he just kept me there until you went back into the office, and then he asked me a few questions, gave me a dollar, and said if I'd meet him at the Bank Exchange that night I'd get five more—and I did."

"He never said a word to me about it."

"Didn't he? Well, he just asked me a mint of questions that night about Ardrey, and when he got through he gave me five dollars more and asked me if that wasn't enough to drink myself to death on. I told him I thought Texas whisky would do it on that. Then he told me to skip the town and try it—and I did that, too."

"You don't seem to have made much of a success at it," observed Jo.

"No; I'm a dismal failure at anything I undertake. But listen there, Jo," said Sam, abruptly, pointing to the sounder; "if that ain't Pete Carter, I'm a sinner!"

"*Pete Carter!*" echoed Jo, listening. "Yes, by all that's evil, that's his writing. Hold on, Sam," he said quickly, as Simpson was about to open the key, "he's giving a '13' to a train order; let him finish."

Sam released the key and waited for the signature. It soon came—Johnson.

"Johnson!" said Jo, wonderingly.

"Johnson nothing!" said Sam, emphatically. "That's Pete Carter, and I'll bet the drinks for the

crowd on it. I've worked with him too often not to know *his* twist."

"There's no doubt of it," remarked Jo. "He's there under an assumed name."

"May be *he* had a row with some agent. Forgive me, Jo," Sam added quickly; I didn't mean to say that. But what you s'pose he changed his name for?"

"It would hardly be safe for him not to. He's wanted for counterfeiting."

"Why, look here, Jo, he's not Pete Carter, the counterfeiter, is he?" asked Simpson in surprise.

"He is for a fact."

"H'm!" and Sam rubbed his chin reflectively. "'Pears to me I might scoop in a little wealth, if that's the case."

"You better go carefully about it, then; he's slippery."

"Oh, I'm on to him. But say, Jo, I struck the despatcher for a job this morning, and he told me to come to headquarters; and as I don't loom up very extensively just now, thought I'd ask you for a biled shirt. Have you got one you can spare?"

The call for "press" was made just then, and as Jo answered the call and arranged his manifold, he told Sam he would fit him out.

"It's a long time since I've had one on," said Sam, "and it will be like putting on an overcoat at this season, but I've got to tone up. I'm a reformed man now, ole fel."

"All right," replied Jo, "go in my room there and

you'll find one. I'm busy on this press just now."

Sam disappeared through the door of the sleeping apartment, and Jo proceeded with his work. In about an hour he was gratified at hearing *"30," and recollecting Sam, went into the room and found that his friend had left by the hall door. Suspecting that all was not right, he began an investigation, and opening the door of his wardrobe, the ragged and buttonless coat and pantaloons of Mr. Simpson met his gaze, while a brand new dress suit, the property of Jo, had been carried off by the reformed man. Our hero was only human; let us close his door and allow him to commune with himself unheard.

* "30"—Telegraphically, "The end."

CHAPTER XVI.

COLONEL JOHNSON.

"How does this strike you?" asked Jack Davis one morning as he came in the office and handed a copy of the Millwood *Banner* to Jo.

Travis took the paper and read the following article, pointed out by Davis:

Colonel Henry P. Johnson, agent and operator at Post Oak, was in the city yesterday looking around with a view to locating. The colonel is a whole-souled, genial gentleman and we trust he will find it to his interest to remain with us.

"You see," said Jack, after Travis had finished reading, "this fellow must have run across Jim Brown, the local editor of the *Banner*, and set 'em up to him. Jim always 'Colonels' a man and calls him a 'whole-souled, genial gentleman,' when he gets a drink or two out of him."

"Carter is acquiring honors early; but I'm thinking it will be dangerous for him to come to Millwood."

"Yes, some one would be likely to find him out in a short time, though I hope not; it might spoil—"

Jack stopped abruptly. Travis looked at him earnestly.

"Spoil what?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing," answered Jack, carelessly.

"That won't do; you're up to something, and I know it."

"Jo, my dear fellow," replied Davis, as he started toward the door, "I'll admit I am scheming, but it is no use talking about it, and you needn't build up any hopes. If I *should* make a ten strike, you'll know it."

"But look here, Jack," said Travis, following him out into the hall, "tell me why you gave Simpson that money and made him leave town."

"So he told you, did he? Well, he'll never get another nickle from me. I'll tell you, though, that I was anxious he should keep what he knew to himself."

Jack then left, and Jo saw no more of him until bed time; he was then informed by Davis that he had asked Brown of the *Banner* about "Colonel Johnson," and Brown had said that the "Colonel" was a late arrival in Texas, had a bushel of money, and was thinking of opening a saloon in Millwood.

"Rather a risky undertaking for an operator," observed Jo.

"I don't suppose he's very sociable, like the balance of the boys," replied Davis. "And as he can't be very well acquainted in the fraternity under the name of Johnson, he won't lose much on old friends."

A few days after this the *Banner* announced that

Colonel Johnson had purchased the "Bank Exchange," and would be pleased to have the citizens of Millwood call and make his acquaintance.

Jo and his friend accepted the invitation, and that same night our hero had the satisfaction of meeting, for the first time, the man he had so unfavorably known over the wire years before, and who at that time had been known as Pete Carter.

"Take something with me, gentlemen," was the "Colonel's" courteous invitation to the young men; and as they leaned against the counter waiting for the bartender to prepare the refreshments called for, Jo took a good look at his old enemy.

Pete Carter was a tall, rather fine-looking man, with long, straight black hair, and eyes of like color; his side whiskers and the absence of a moustache set off his firmly compressed lips and square chin to advantage. To a casual observer, his appearance was certainly very favorable; yet his manners, though affable in the extreme on this occasion, and his dress, though genteel and good-fitting, could not hide the character of the man, which clearly revealed itself in his conversation and was plainly visible through his transparent smile.

"Both you fellows operators, eh?" the "Colonel" remarked, as he took his toddy in one hand and a glass of water in the other. "I am something of a plug myself—worked down at Post Oak a while; but —— the business—it never did me any good; a man's a fool to stay in it. Well, here's to better acquaintance."

Jo took a mild drink, as did also his friend Jack, and while they complacently replaced their glasses on the counter, the Colonel made a wry face and drove the glass of water up to his mouth in such a hurry that Jo thought he would break all his front teeth.

"So you don't like telegraphing, Colonel?" asked Jack.

"No; —— telegraphing! The longer you work for a telegraph company the less appreciation it has of your services. I'm nothing but a ham, but there's many a first-class operator who would say that's the truth. Why, —— me! if I didn't saw the wood for an office I was running once to save the company that expense, and when I sent in a voucher for a dollar for the saw, I'll be teetotally blasted if they didn't say they couldn't allow it—and I had to pay it myself! —— 'em!" And the Colonel's eyes snapped vengefully as he gritted his teeth in a horribly unpleasant manner.

"Where was that, Colonel?" asked Davis.

"That was up in——" here the Colonel was seized with a violent fit of coughing, and the two young men exchanged glances.

"Yes," finally resumed the Colonel, "that was up in York State. You fellows ever work in that country?"

"Yes, we're both from there," answered Jack.

The Colonel did not appear disposed to make any further inquiries in that direction, and changed the subject by inviting the young men to take a fresh cigar.

As Jo proceeded to comply with the invitation, he remarked that the change in proprietors appeared to benefit the "Exchange," as the saloon was rapidly filling up.

"Oh, yes," replied Johnson; "it's the free lunch that does it—that always draws a crowd. Now, look at that lunch counter."

Immediately upon Jo turning, his eyes encountered a familiar form, wearing a rather worn but familiar suit of clothes, leaning over the lunch table. Yes, that was Sam, reaching with his long arms to the farthest end and stuffing himself as if he had eaten nothing for a month.

Simpson, upon seeing Jo, approached him and held out a greasy, dirty hand.

"Shake, old boy," he said; "glad to see you. Just in time to join you. Introduce me to his nibs with the sideburns; he looks like he was going to set 'em up."

"Well, Sam," laughed Jo, "times change, but you don't; you're the same old Sam."

"Come here, Simpson," interrupted Davis, taking his arm and leading him up to Johnson. "Colonel, allow me to make you acquainted with one of the lights of the fraternity—an electric light, as it were; a man whose home is anywhere from Maine to California, from Florida to Texas—anywhere as long as he can hear the hum of a wire; who treads lightly the pathway of life, with but one end in view."

"And that is——?"

"The end of a whisky bottle."

"We'll let him have one, then," and the Colonel made a sign to the barkeeper.

Jo could find no pleasure in the Colonel's company, and after a vain attempt to induce Jack to leave with him, bade them all good-night and departed.

Jack and Sam remained until they had "laid out" the Colonel, then left the Bank Exchange and went to the Tivoli. There, seated at a round table, and over several glasses of beer, Jack and his companion talked until midnight.

The next morning Jo was surprised to find that Davis had not come home during the night. As he was well acquainted with his friend's impulsive nature, and knew how anxious he had been to meet Carter, he feared that something serious might have occurred between them. He tried several times to raise the depot office, but could get no answer. Towards noon, however, Jack walked into the office.

"Well, old man," saluted Jo, grasping him cordially by the hand, "you gave me a fine scare; thought Carter had done something to you."

"So he did," replied Davis, mournfully; "he got me full." Then looking at Jo, while a sad smile overspread his handsome features, "and the old-time tramp, your friend Sam, and I, met on a common level, for we both got beastly drunk, painted the town red and rolled into bed together with our boots on."

"I'm sorry to hear this, Jack; but you're a sensible fellow, and one bout of this kind will do you. You better go to the office now; they've been calling you all the morning."

"They'll call a mighty long time if they wait till *I* answer. Jo, I've been fired!"

"Fired!" repeated Jo. "For what?"

"Oh, old Dickson had it in for me, and this little racket gave him the golden opportunity, which he profited by. I don't care much, though; I wanted a lay-off, and thanks to you, I've saved a right smart."

"Come now, Jack, you're not going to leave here. We can get you back easy enough."

"May be so, but I wouldn't go back. I'm out, and I'm going to skip."

Jo tried to dissuade him from his purpose, but all in vain, and the next day Jack had left Texas far behind him.

CHAPTER XVII.

SAM'S LUCK.

Sam Simpson now revelled in luxury. He had made himself "solid" with the Colonel, who was very much pleased with him and enjoyed his "shop talk."

One morning, however, our bibulous friend received a deep wound to his sensitive feelings; he had asked the bartender for one more drink, and had actually been courteously but firmly refused.

"No, Sam," the dispenser of liquids behind the bar had said, "you've had enough; here it is only eleven o'clock, and you've had five drinks since I've been on watch. Can't give you any more; it'll break us up in business."

"Just one more snifter, Mat," pleaded Sam, "then I'll go."

"I think you better go now, you —— old tramp," said Colonel Johnson, who had entered unobserved by Simpson. "I've been holding you up ever since I opened here, supposin' you would get work sometime, but you'll never strike a lick as long as you can get a drink."

"That's all right, Colonel; but I ain't no sardine,

and I don't allow no man to call me names." Sam had just enough bug-juice aboard to make him reckless, and he laid his hand fondly on the cracker bowl at the end of the counter.

The proprietor of the "Exchange" was not perfectly sober himself, and he ominously showed his teeth and glared savagely at Simpson.

"Get out, or I'll kick you into the street!" he shouted, with a horrible oath.

"Let's see you do it," said Sam, defiantly.

The Colonel advanced to put his threat into execution, but Sam quickly picked up the bowl and hurled it with all his might at the Colonel, striking him squarely on the forehead. The fragments of the dish scattered in every direction, while the Colonel staggered back against the lunch table, partially stunned by the blow, with several streams of blood tracing their course down his cheeks.

"Kick me out, will you?" said Sam, thoroughly aroused and boiling over with anger. "You better not fool with me, *Pete Carter!*"

That name brought Carter at once to his senses, and quickly recovering himself he sprang forward, his face fairly ablaze with rage.

"D—— you!" he cried; "I'll stop *your* mouth!" And pulling a pistol from his pocket, he pointed it full at Sam's head, pulled the trigger, and the loud report of the weapon rang through the saloon.

Simultaneously with the report of the pistol, Carter's arm was thrown up by Jo, who had bounded into the room, and a well-dealt blow from the same

source laid the counterfeiter flat on the floor, while the bullet whistled harmlessly over Sam's head and buried itself in the costly mirror behind the bar.

Sam quickly picked up the pistol, which had fallen on the floor, and levelled it at Carter's head. Mat, the barkeeper, made an aggressive movement, but several policemen, attracted by the pistol shot, made their appearance at this moment and he discreetly kept quiet.

"Oh, I'm on to you, *Colonel* Carter," said Sam to the prostrate man. Now, who's a —— old tramp? Kick me out, will you? Here, cops, bag your game—this is the notorious Pete Carter, the counterfeiter!"

None of the officers were disposed to believe this statement, but Jo soon convinced them that Sam spoke the truth, and their astonishment, of course, was great.

"This is a good day's work for you boys," remarked one as he placed the handcuffs on the prisoner's wrists. "There's a big reward out for this feller."

"Which Sam alone is entitled to," said Jo. "I don't want any of it."

"Well, it's a cold day when *I* throw it over my shoulder," observed Sam.

The Exchange was cleared of the people, the doors locked and the keys taken possession of by an officer; the whole party then started for the jail, followed by the usual complement of bootblacks and newsboys, anxious to get a glimpse of the prisoner. In an hour the "Colonel's" identity was

known all over town, and it is perhaps needless to add that the next issue of the *Banner* "done up" the whole-souled, genial gentleman in good shape for the edification of its numerous readers.

As the two friends walked down the street apart from the crowd, Sam laid his hand affectionately on Jo's shoulder.

"That was a pretty close shave, Jo," he said, earnestly; "I never knew that life had any charms for me until I looked into the muzzle of that six-shooter. My life ain't much account to any one else, but it's worth a heap to me, and I feel mighty thankful to you for saving it."

"Don't mention it, Sam; you would have done the same for me."

"It kinder makes me feel ashamed, Jo, to think of the way I have treated you—especially about those clothes——"

"Never mind," interrupted Jo, "we won't talk about that."

"Well, I've been a pretty hard citizen for a dozen years or so; but I'll go on to a new leaf now, you bet."

"I sincerely hope so. But say, Sam, what will you do with that reward when you get it?"

"Now, Jo, you strike me hard. I don't suppose it'll be enough to retire on, so I reckon I'll buy Western Union stock and make myself solid for a job for life."

"There are plenty of good investments you can make with it. I hope you'll use it judiciously."

"So do I; but I'm a little doubtful about it."

"You must take care of it, Sam—put it into something solid and watch it grow; properly invested, it will make you wealthy."

"Lord! Jo, you almost make me think I'm a bloated aristocrat; but it's a melancholy fact that I've not enough to buy a beer—can't you loan me a dollar on my prospects?"

"If you'll promise not to buy drink with it, here it is."

"All right, I promise; thank you, old pard. I'll get something to eat, then go and put in my claim for that wealth. See you later."

"Very well. Come up to the office after you're through."

Sam walked a short distance, then looked around and seeing Jo turn a corner, made a dive into a saloon and in less than a minute his promise to Jo was broken.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, as he cleared his throat and replaced the glass on the counter, "that was a long, dry talk. Jo's a dandy—never kicks. By thunder! come to think of it, I promised not to buy drink with this dollar. Oh, well, that's all right, I won't—I'll save out a dime of it for lunch. Barkeep, take something with me," and he smiled patronizingly on the bartender, who accepted the invitation with alacrity.

Sam did not feel absolutely certain of obtaining the reward offered for the arrest of Carter, and to provide against possible contingencies, thought it best to establish credit while he had the funds to do it with.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WON AND LOST.

The next day Pete Carter, in charge of the United States Marshal, left Millwood for Missouri, the scene of his latest achievements in the counterfeiting line, and in less than a month the news reached Millwood that he had been tried, convicted and given the utmost penalty.

In a few days after the receipt of the above information, a telegram came from Jack requesting Jo's presence at Ardrey as soon as possible. It was an easy matter to obtain "relief," and Travis was not long in making up his mind to start the next day.

Sam, nearly sober, accompanied him to the depot, and promised again and again to take good care of the money he would receive for the capture of Carter.

As the train started, Jo hastily grasped Sam's hand and wishing him good luck, jumped aboard. Sam felt his friend place something in his hand, and on opening it discovered a twenty dollar note. Poor Sam's eyes grew moist as he gazed on the train that was bearing away his benefactor.

"There," he thought, "goes a friend who *is* a friend. It's nothing to befriend a prosperous man; but when one is down as I am, with no chance on earth of ever returning a kindness, such an act as this should be appreciated, for it is as unselfish as it

is rare." Then his lips parted and a fervent "May God prosper him," came from between them. Anything approaching a prayer was such an unusual occurrence for Sam that he stopped quickly and glanced around as if fearful some one had overheard him. "Yes," he muttered, as he wended his way up town from the depot, "Jo has been good to me, and I couldn't begin to pay him back; but he'll get these twenty cases out of the reward when I get it."

It was still some time before the promised reward came, but come it finally did, in the shape of a United States Government check, payable to the order of Samuel Simpson.

The first thing Sam did was to get his check cashed at the bank; the next, to buy himself a suit of clothes. Possessed now of the money and a neatly-fitting suit, he sallied forth to pay his debts.

He had quit drinking, and although pressed by the various barkeepers where he settled his bills, he boldly refused to even take a glass.

Of course he was "Colonel." What! a man with a nice new suit of clothes, plenty of money to throw away, a really fine presence, and in a Texas town—and *not* be a colonel? It's absurd!

Jim Brown, the local of the *Banner*, of course had to interview Sam on the story of his past life and future intentions. The next issue of the paper contained a glowing account of his life and adventures. He had been born of one of the wealthiest families in America; was related to the royal family of England; had spent several fortunes in aimless wanderings around the earth, but of late years his

wealthy father had declined to honor any more of his drafts. The article wound up by saying that Colonel Simpson, upon the death of his father, would come into possession of the latter's vast estates and would undoubtedly invest largely in Texas, but that now, with the limited means at his command, he would content himself with building a large hotel, an institution that Millwood stood very much in need of. Sam had evidently filled up Mr. Brown.

Our friend, however, found his honors burdensome and determined to leave Millwood, and strike for a place where he was not so well known. He therefore visited the tailor shop again and took from the old coat he had left there a bundle of time-worn letters, which he handled with as much care perhaps as he would his roll of greenbacks. Then from his old vest pockets came forth an agate stylus, three short lead-pencils, a pen-holder, and a lot of other odds and ends which constitute the goods, chattels and effects of the tramp operator. These he carefully deposited in his pocket, then left the shop, and going to the bank bought five hundred dollars' worth of New York exchange. Seating himself at a desk, he wrote the following:

MILLWOOD, TEXAS, December 20, 18—

MY DEAR MOTHER:

Enclosed I send you $500.00. It is intended as a Christmas present for you. Use it in making yourself comfortable.

Your affectionate son, SAM.

P. S.—Is Miss Bessie still single?

The check was enclosed, the letter sealed, and in getting the superscription to suit him, Sam had to refer to the time-worn letters so carefully guarded. He probably had not been in the habit of writing to that address.

As Sam proceeded to straighten the package of letters preparatory to placing them in his pocket, a business card fell from among them into his lap; he picked it up, while his features assumed a pleased expression at the recollections the card brought to his mind.

"Old Mac!" he mused. "Many a fearful dose has he given me; but that was before I went to work there. Well, I've drank a heap worse stuff than Mac gave me in Ardrey."

He mechanically turned the card over, when some writing on the reverse side caught his eye; he examined it closely, then leaned back in his chair and for awhile appeared to be engaged in deep thought.

"Shucks!" he at length exclaimed; "I don't s'pose Mac has it now, even if he's alive; but I'll send this to Jo with the money I got on it and the twenty cases he loaned me."

Without further ado, Simpson commenced another letter; it was short, and when finished he folded it up and placed it with the card in an envelope, which he addressed to Jo Travis at Ardrey. He then walked to the postoffice, where he bought a money order which he also placed in the envelope.

The letters posted, Sam felt much relieved.

"Now," said he, "I'll round-up my friends and give them a blow-out. Then I'll skip the town."

It was now dark, and the air was getting cold. He was desirous of sheltering himself from the cold blasts of the north wind. His former companions, he knew, were all warming themselves at saloon stoves and drinking "hot Scotch." Where could *he* go? There were no libraries where he could read, no door open where respectable society bade him enter; his style of language, uninspired by stimulants, was the soul of penury and the exuberance of his spirits was dead.

In this strait he mechanically and unconsciously, almost, dropped into the Bank Exchange. Glasses were tingling, billiard balls were dancing around on their green play-ground—all was life, and in unison with his feelings and tastes. Alas! It was only a moment and he was one of the crowd—a lord and leader, and the center of an admiring group of such friends as one finds in these places.

The remainder of Sam's glory can be anticipated. From the dazzling saloon to the gambling table was only a step, and one which few drunken men fail to take. It is needless to say Sam took it.

From the allurements of the green cloth Sam arose the next morning, dazed, confounded and almost prostrated by his all night's dissipation; but he rose a pauper. He could not realize it—he plunged his hand first in one pocket, then another, and found nothing.

Sauntering up the street in the cold, gray dawn of

the morning, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, the very picture of despair, he saw a light in the tailor shop, and on looking in the window saw the man of whom he had purchased his suit, preparing for his day's work.

Sam stopped, thought a moment, then entered the door. In fifteen minutes he came out, wearing the old suit he had left there the day previous.

"My glory has departed," he thought, as he walked on up the street, jingling a few silver dollars he had in his pocket; "yet I am tolerably well off. My debts are paid, my credit's good and I've a few dollars that I made on this clothes trade."

He walked on until he reached the depot. The west-bound train was there ready to start. Sam jumped aboard, and in a few minutes had left Millwood forever.

CHAPTER XIX.

JO'S CHAMPION.

When Jack Davis found himself minus a position on the morning following his little episode with Sam, he looked at the matter philosophically, concluded it was all for the best, and realizing that he had a little money to splurge on, determined to put a long contemplated plan into execution. This was nothing more nor less than a trip to Ardrey in Jo's behalf; he had long held a vague, indefinite notion that he might be able to establish his friend's innocence by some means, and now that he was footloose, determined to start at once in the furtherance of that object. Energetic, brave and determined, Jack was thoroughly devoted to his friend's interest, and though he was rather an impulsive sort of a fellow, he usually hung tenaciously to an idea as long as there was enough of it left to catch on to.

In due course of time Davis arrived at Elk Falls, tired and worn. He went at once to the Prairie Queen Hotel, where he wrote his name in the register with a great flourish and such a profusion of ink that the diamond-pinned clerk behind the counter turned green with envy and smiled sardonically under the corners of his silken moustache.

The following evening Jack left the hotel and in half an hour presented his card at the residence of Mr. John Garnet, with the request that it be handed to Mrs. Buskin.

He was ushered into a luxuriously furnished parlor and informed that the lady would be in directly. This Jack considered a favorable augury, as he had been somewhat doubtful about Mrs. Buskin consenting to see him.

Possessed of an abundance of assurance, nothing abashed our friend; and when Mrs. Buskin entered the parlor becomingly attired in deep mourning, her sad, expressive eyes showing that she was pleased to meet him, he advanced towards her with an easy grace, and lightly clasping the jeweled hand she had extended, bowed low and assured her of the happiness it gave him to meet her again.

"Thank you, Mr. Davis," she replied, seating herself on the sofa; "I have not forgotten you, though it seems odd that we should meet again so far away from the place I last saw you."

"It must appear so to you," said Jack as he took the seat to which she motioned him; "but being up in this country, it was natural that I should hunt up the only person in it I had ever met."

"I am indeed glad you called; but as I have often thought of the conversation we had once in Millwood and of the questions you then asked me, you must pardon me if I am inclined to think that you are here for the purpose of questioning others on the same subject. Am I right?"

"You are, Madame; and as you have undoubtedly kept the secret which you became possessed of while at Millwood, I will come to the point at once. You must know that I have the interest of my friend—"

"Your cousin, you mean," interrupted Mrs. Buskin.

"Well, my cousin—I am here in his interest. Have you learned since your return what his trouble was?"

"Yes."

"Do you believe him guilty?"

"He acknowledged it."

"Do you not think he could have been mistaken?"

"There was a witness to the affair."

"I know that; but from what you have heard, and from what *you know*——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Davis," she interrupted; "you are assuming too much. I *know* nothing whatever concerning the affair."

"But, Madame, if I was to convince you that you *do* know something about it, although wholly ignorant as to its connection with the matter, would you assist me in arriving at a conclusion?"

"If I can be of any service to you in the case, you may proceed and I will aid you all I can."

"Mrs. Buskin, I thank you; and with your help and other evidence I have, I am confident I can prove my friend innocent."

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed Mrs. Buskin, warmly. "Oh, Mr. Davis, if you can but do that, you will make at least one heart happy."

"I am glad to see you take such an interest in

him," said Jack, surprised, but delighted at this outburst; "I had no idea you thought so much of Jo."

"It is not that exactly," she hastened to reply; "but there is a young lady—my cousin—who has been *such* a friend to me in my trouble. She, the kind, generous girl, will breathe free again."

"That is Miss Nettie?"

"Yes."

"All right; we will arrange her breathing apparatus for her very soon. But now, Mrs. Buskin, you may remember what you stated to me in Millwood—that you went from Hydefield on a certain night and stopped at Ardrey. Can you tell who you saw at the depot there?"

It was easy to see that this recital affected Mrs. Buskin deeply. Davis was about to apologize, but she raised her hand deprecatingly.

"No, no," she said, "there is no need of an apology from you; I will offer one for my weakness. I have no recollection of whom I saw at the depot."

"I am of the opinion that you told Mr. Harris (or Mr. Travis) that Mr. Buskin left you at the house of a friend while he went over to the depot?"

The widow held her handkerchief to her face and was silent.

"I am aware, Madame," said Jack, "that this is a painful subject to you, and perhaps I had better drop it."

Mrs. Buskin removed her handkerchief and turned her eyes full on Jack.

"Mr. Davis," she said, slowly and calmly, "Mr. Buskin deceived me about his business before I married him; he never treated me well after our marriage; he took me to Texas and left me among strangers without a dollar—yet for all that, he was my husband. I am willing to aid you, but I think I see whither this matter is tending, and will now inform you that I will do nothing whatever to assist in bringing his name into connection with it."

"My dear Madame, let me hasten to assure you that I have no such intention. An unguarded expression from a man in a state of intoxication gave me the clue."

"To what?"

"To the real criminal; but it was not your husband. Neither was it Jo Travis, for Ward was unquestionably alive two hours after Jo left Ardrey."

"That may all be true; but how do you explain the fact that Mr. Ward's watch was found in Mr. Travis' valise?"

"What's that?" asked Jack, excitedly. "Ward's watch in Jo's valise?"

"Yes: when the valise was returned from Norvelle, where it had been left, the watch was found in it."

"Oh, well, as to that, I presume Jo may have bought it from him."

"That is hardly possible, as it had been given back to Mr. Ward by the jeweler only a few moments before Mr. Travis left."

Jack was silent. He had evidently run upon a *snag*.

"You never heard this before?" asked the widow.

"Never," replied Davis, thoughtfully. "But I do not intend to allow any obstacle to stand in my way. There is more in this than I had supposed, for some one besides Jo put that watch there. Jo Travis was never a *thief*, Mrs. Buskin."

"There are many in Ardrey who think differently. Even his most intimate friend, Mr. Newins, admitted that it looked very bad."

"Mr. Newins?" repeated Jack. "I think he was the one who went to the train when Jo left?"

"Yes, sir; he went to the train, and as he passed the window of the depot, saw your cousin strike Mr. Ward."

"Well, did he not go in the depot to see the extent of Mr. Ward's injuries after the train left?"

"No. He was not on good terms with Mr. Ward and supposed it was nothing serious."

"Was he the only witness?"

"I believe so—but you can see Mr. Newins himself at the hotel; he lives in Elk Falls now."

"Are you acquainted with him?"

"Oh, yes—he calls frequently."

Jack looked at the widow curiously, but she regarded him with an amused smile and abruptly changed the subject.

After a few moments further conversation, Jack bade Mrs. Buskin good night and returned to the hotel.

On entering the hotel our friend was so absorbed in his thoughts that he ran against a young man

standing near the door, and nearly knocked him down.

"I beg your pardon, sir," apologized Jack, quickly. "I did not see you."

"Well, I think I'm big enough for a one-eyed man to see, and you appear to have two good ones," replied the young man, blusteringly.

Jack, who had started for the clerk's desk, turned around upon hearing this remark and took a look at the speaker.

He saw before him a young man somewhat under medium size, of slight build, red, curly hair and a very diminutive moustache of a brick-red color; his frock coat was too short in the waist and still shorter in the sleeves, showing a pair of large cuffs with loud, gold-plated buttons; his pants were so tight that Jack would have wagered a box of cigars they had a rubber strip down the side seams to stretch and permit the wearer's enormous feet to get through. A large, flashy necktie of a variegated hue, and a gold-headed ebony cane, completed the outfit of this back-woods dude.

Jack smiled contemptuously as he answered:

"You are quite right; half an eye would be enough to see through you."

"Look here, sir; do you mean to insult me?"

"Insult nothing. That's not in my line. I bumped against you accidentally and apologized like a gentleman; if that don't satisfy you, what are you going to do about it?"

The young man raised his cane threateningly.

Jack instantly caught it and snapped it in two across his knee, and threw the pieces on the floor.

"Now try something else," he said quietly.

"I will. You'll hear from me in a few minutes," said the insulted gentleman, as he turned and walked out the door.

"Ta, ta!" Jack called out after him. "If you don't come back, write."

Jack gave the matter no further thought, and after lounging around the reading-room for a while, sought his own room, thinking he would retire early and get a good night's rest. He had been in his room but a few minutes, however, when he was a little surprised at hearing a knock at his door. Answering it, he was handed a note by a tall, thin-visaged, sickly looking man, who had the appearance of one doing a disagreeable duty. Jack opened the note and read as follows:

SIR—You have insulted me and must apolegize or fite. I hold my honor deer and if you are a gent. you will give me satisfaction. Your friend,

WILLIAM NEWINS.

P. S.—Give Mr. Grubbs the anser.

Jack laughed. So, thought he, that was Will Newins. Good joke on me; 'twon't do for me to kill him. But pshaw! No man ever sent that kind of a note and fought.

"Well," he said aloud to the man who brought the note, "are you the Mr. Grubbs mentioned in this document?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right, Mr. Grubbs. You may tell your friend that I will not apologize. You may also say that I will meet him at six o'clock in the morning, back of the hotel; and, Grubbs, we will fight with six-shooters."

"S-s-six——?" faltered Grubbs.

"Shooters, Grubbs—six-shooters. Now, good-night." And he closed the door and locked it.

As Jack was preparing to jump into bed, another knock sounded on his door. This time Mr. Grubbs appeared with his friend Newins.

"Mr. Davis," said Grubbs, "my friend scarcely understands the nature of the weapons you mention; but I suppose pistols of small calibre——"

"Or regular duelling pistols?" interrupted Newins.

"No, gents, nothing less than forty-five calibre; shoot till you're unloaded, then fill up again—here's the style." And Jack pulled a navy-six from under his pillow and pointed it at Grubbs, who backed towards the door. Newins kept behind his second and begged Jack to put up the weapon.

"That's an ugly looking thing, Mr. Davis; "it might go off."

"Yes, so it might," replied Jack, replacing it under the pillow; "that's what it is made for. Have seats, gentlemen, and we will arrange the preliminaries."

"I am very sorry, Mr. Davis," began Newins when they were seated, "that I should be called upon——"

"Oh, don't mention it," interrupted Jack. "A

little thing like this don't disturb me, though I must confess we are a little more precipitate in such matters in Texas than——"

"Texas!" exclaimed both.

"Yes, Texas—why?"

"My dear Mr. Davis," said Newins, "are you from Texas?"

"I am."

"I had no idea you were a stranger here, or I should not have acted so rudely."

"Oh, that's nothing—I'm used to it; don't let that worry you. Now, as to the time—six o'clock may be rather early for you; suppose, then, we make it seven?"

"Oh, hang it, Mr. Davis, I couldn't think of fighting a man all the way from Texas. I'm perfectly satisfied—ain't I, Ned?"

"Yes," replied Grubbs, "he is perfectly satisfied; and if you are, I think Mr. Newins will order the wine."

"Anything's agreeable to me," said Jack; "but the exhilarating effects of sparkling champagne double discounts the pistol as a peacemaker."

Newins therefore ordered the wine, and in a short time the trifling differences that for awhile promised a serious termination were entirely forgotten, and when Newins left the hotel that night he thought Jack Davis the best fellow he had ever met.

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE TRAIL.

The acquaintance so singularly formed between Davis and Newins was kept up on both sides eagerly. Newins was necessary to Jack, and the latter was greatly admired by the young coxcomb. It did not take long to discover that the old friend of Jo Travis was deeply enamored of Nettie Matthews. Newins was so completely infatuated that he could not keep it to himself five minutes. Whether his affection was returned could not be learned by Jack, but he thought it unlikely that such could be the case.

Jack remained at Elk Falls about six weeks, leaving the town but twice during that time—once to go to Hydefield and the other time for a trip to Norvelle.

His visit to the latter place had been unsuccessful; therefore he decided, on his return to the Falls, to defer his trip to Ardrey no longer. He accordingly apprised Newins of his intention and asked the young man to accompany him. The invitation was accepted, and in a few days the two young men were in Ardrey.

On the second evening after their arrival, Newins

claimed the privilege of an old friend of the family and took Jack with him to call at the Matthews' residence.

In place of the old hospitable tavern so well known to western travelers, stood a fine, large house, surrounded by handsome grounds adorned with choice shrubbery. The golden rays of the departed sun yet lingered in the west and cast their mellow tints over the beautiful garden when Newins and Jack made their appearance at the door of the mansion. They were ushered into a richly-furnished parlor, the walls of which were handsomely adorned with paintings, while here and there bits of bric-a-brac were distributed, indicating the presence of taste, culture and refinement. In a few moments a door opened, and Jack was spell-bound at the vision of beauty before him.

There was Nettie, not exactly as Jo had described her, but possessing more of queenly grace and modest beauty than he had expected to find, even from his friend's most enthusiastic picturings. Her merry, laughing eyes looked in wondering expectancy at Newins, with whom she shook hands. Will was clearly very much embarrassed, but managed, in a bungling sort of way, to introduce Jack, who at once decided that the handsome young lady before him cared no more for Will Newins than she did for the man in the moon.

After a few minutes had passed in pleasant talk, the door again opened and an elderly gentleman, whom Jack at once knew to be the Professor,

entered. He shook hands with Newins with unmistakable coolness, which, however, the inordinate conceit of that individual did not permit him to notice. On being introduced to Jack, the Professor looked him full in the eye, then grasped his hand, giving it a hearty squeeze, and assured him he was glad to make his acquaintance.

Time had dealt gently with the old man, for while his hair was gray and his face deeply furrowed, his eye was as keen, his form as erect and his step as elastic as when we last saw him. He listened with interest as Jack told of the wonders of the great State of Texas, and as Nettie was also listening intently, we are somewhat afraid that the relater did not confine himself strictly within the bounds of truthfulness.

Jack was very much taken with Nettie, and as her eyes expressed wonderment at the marvelous stories he was telling, he felt that if he only had her for an auditor his tongue would never tire.

When the little French clock on the mantel chimed out the hour of ten, Jack and his companion arose and left.

After breakfast the next morning Jack strolled over towards the Matthews residence, leaving Newins at the hotel. On approaching the house he was very much gratified at seeing the old man reclining on a settee in the garden, busily engaged in perusing the morning paper.

The Professor looked out over the paper as Jack stopped at the gate, and recognizing his visitor of

the previous evening, asked him in. The young man needed no second invitation, and in a moment was seated in a rustic chair facing Jo's old friend.

Politics, crops and a few other subjects were disposed of in short order, and then Jack came to the business that brought him to Ardrey.

"Mr. Matthews," he said, as he deftly rolled a cigarette, "I am anxious to talk to you concerning my business in this place. I have often heard of you, and have a friend who thinks there is nobody like the Professor. For that reason I have no hesitancy in unbosoming myself. Got a match?" Jack had stuck the cigarette between his lips while he fished around in his vest pockets for a match without finding one. The Professor handed him the desired article, as he asked:

"Who is this friend you speak of?"

"His name is Jo Travis," replied Jack as he lit his cigarette.

Matthews looked at Davis closely. "Jo Travis?" he repeated. "I suppose there can be no mistake about it?"

Jack took a few whiffs on his cigarette, threw it to one side, unintentionally spat on the Professor's left boot, and looking at the old man, answered:

"No mistake at all. Jo told me all about his trouble here, and all about you; he considered you quite a friend."

"He was right," said the Professor, warmly, seizing Jack's hand.

"I have always been Jo's friend,
And always will be, to the end."

"Well, Mr. Matthews," remarked Davis, taking off his hat and dashing it on the ground, "I'm not much account at slinging out rhymes, so I'll not try; but I'll say, in the language of the poet, 'Them's my sentiments,' and I mean every word of it."

The old man laughed heartily and slapped Jack good-naturedly on the shoulder.

"I'm glad to hear it," said he; "and if you came here to help that boy, you'll find me with you, heart, soul and pocketbook."

"Now we are 'gettin' there, Eli,'" said Jack. "That's something like it. I left Jo for the purpose of coming here and straightening out this affair if possible. He knows nothing about my coming, however."

Jack then drew his chair close to the old man, and for an hour or more the two kept up a low and earnest conversation.

Finally Jack arose, and promising the Professor to call soon again, went out the gate and passed on down the street.

CHAPTER XXI.

JACK SHOWS HIS HAND.

"You're a nice fellow," was Newins salutation as Jack entered the hotel.

"What's the matter?" asked Jack. "Don't you get enough to eat?"

"What you run off up to Matthews' for?"

"Who told you that I was at Matthews'?"

"I saw you chinning the old man in the garden. Look here, Jack Davis, I've got an idea."

"Don't give it away then; you'll never have another."

"My idea is that you came to Ardrey for no other purpose than to see Nettie Matthews; let me tell—"

"You ought to study astronomy, Will; you wouldn't need a telescope. A man with your perceptive qualities should turn to the sublime."

"You can't turn it off that way; but I'll tell you now, Jack Davis, that if you come between that girl and me, there'll be trouble."

That Newins was laboring under considerable excitement was very plain. Jack was in a good humor, and as he was perfectly disgusted with the man, determined to have some sport with him.

"Now, Will," said he, soothingly, "if the young lady chooses to admire my handsome form and general appearance, am I to be blamed? You shouldn't call me to account for turning the ladies' heads. It's a way I have, and I really can't help it."

"I don't see what they admire in *you*. Now, if *I* was the object ——" and Newins threw back his shoulders, tossed his head, twirled his little gold-headed cane and strutted around as if to say that it would be nothing very surprising if all the dear creatures were to fall in love with *him*.

"Don't, Will," said Davis, "ladies never like a turkey-gobbler strut; take a reef in yourself and walk like a man."

"You're very sharp for a man with such few brains," retorted Newins.

"Your brains appear to have all run to feet; how do you suppose a girl could ever love those fiddle-boxes?"

"You can stop now; I'll not be trifled with."

"Yes," said Jack, sarcastically, "I should judge you are a bad man."

"Judge not, lest ye be judged," said Newins, for want of something better to say.

"Love not, lest ye get left," replied Jack.

"*You* ain't the one to cut me out."

"Perhaps not, but I'd go hang myself if I couldn't do it. But come with me to the telegraph office; I want to send a message."

Newins felt somewhat sour, but accompanied him to the office; here Jack wrote the following message:

ARDREY, August 27, 187—

Jo T. HARRIS, Millwood, Texas:

Come at once; all is well. Answer. JACK.

"I am wiring a friend of mine to come here, Will; and by the way, he's an old friend of yours, too."

Newins glanced at the message as Jack handed it to the operator, and shook his head.

"No," he said, "I don't know any Jo Harris."

In pronouncing that name, the similarity between it and another must have struck him, for he gave a start and changed color.

"Oh, yes you do; but you know him better by the name of *Travis*."

"*Jo Travis!*" cried Newins; "why, he's dead."

"I know you said he was; but you lied, Will Newins—simply *lied!*—and he will be here in a week to tell you so himself."

"Well, if he ain't dead, he'll never dare to come here; he killed Ward, and——"

"Now you lie again, Will Newins, and you know it!"

"But he's a thief; he stole Ward's watch——"

Jack's fist cut the sentence short.

"Take that, you red-headed, big-footed dude!" he cried, thoroughly aroused; and Newins went spinning over into the corner of the room, where he gave one wild clutch at the wall then fell in a heap, unconscious, with the blood streaming from his mouth.

"Poor fool," said Jack as he walked over to him,

"my anger got the better of my contempt for him; I hope he's not hurt much."

He stooped down and raised the head of the unconscious man; the operator came out with a sprinkler full of water, which he threw over Newins, who gasped once or twice, opened his eyes, and after a little effort rose to a sitting posture.

Jack expected to hear a torrent of abuse and prepared for it; but Newins, instead, commenced to whine in the most pitiful manner. At this, Jack, with a look of contempt, left the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

JO'S RETURN.

As Davis had promised, Jo Travis was in Ardrey in less than a week after the sending of the telegram. Jack met him at the train which arrived about midnight, and the two friends, happy at being once more together, proceeded to the hotel, which was located near the place where the old tavern formerly stood; here, in Jack's room, Jo was an eager listener to his friend's recital of the progress and discoveries he had made. Many cigars had been smoked and several hours passed, when Jack exclaimed:

"Now, Jo, you know all that I do. Every thing is in shape, and there is not a doubt as to the result."

"Well, Jack, old fellow," responded Travis with much feeling, "such friendship as yours is wonderful and merits a greater reward than I ever hope to bestow; and even if matters do not turn out as we wish——"

"Oh, there's no use in that kind of talk. Come on to bed; we'll get a good rest to-night for to-morrow's business."

Just as the sun was tinting the house-tops with its golden rays the next morning, Jo left the hotel and

passed up the street. As he approached the Matthews residence an old, silver-haired gentleman came out and walked to the front gate; stopping, he looked toward the rising sun, and as though entranced by the loveliness of the scene, took off his hat and gazed in silent admiration.

Jo could stand it no longer.

"Professor!" he cried, as he dashed through the gate and seized the old man's extended arms. "You know me, don't you?"

"Thank the Lord, Jo, you are with us again. Bless me, if seeing you hasn't made me weak—let's sit down."

They sat down on a rustic bench, and the Professor looked admiringly upon the young man.

"You gave great promise when you were a boy," he said, smiling, "but you have far excelled your promises. Texas has been kind to you."

"It has indeed. It's a grand old State, and down there we are very proud of her."

Each had a great deal to say, and it was evident if left undisturbed they would talk all day. Presently, however, the young man's ears were attracted by a clipping sound proceeding from the garden, and turning around he saw a graceful form, modestly attired in a pretty, white morning dress, with a blue ribbon knotted at the waist, bending over a rose bush.

Travis felt the blood quickly rush through his veins and his heart throb with violence; he sat a moment as if entranced, while he watched a fair

hand with a pair of scissors clipping the half-opened roses. Then, when a pair of roguish, laughing eyes peeped saucily out from under the jaunty hat, there was no longer any doubt, and Jo, with an utter disregard for the old Professor, jumped around the bench with such recklessness that the old man was upset with it, and in the twinkling of an eye our hero was at Nettie's side.

"Nettie!"

The girl looked up inquiringly; then scissors, roses, hat and curl-papers, all were forgotten, as she threw herself into her lover's arms.

"Oh, *Jo!*" was all she could say.

The Professor picked himself up, righted the bench, brushed his clothes a little with his hands and discreetly walked away.

Nettie disengaged herself, stepped back a few paces, and regarded Jo attentively, while her brilliant eyes lit up with the fire of love and admiration.

"*My!*" she exclaimed, "how tall you have grown, and *how* handsome."

"I can return the latter part of that compliment, for I never even dreamed of such beauty as yours."

"Oh, dear—I guess I'll have to stop."

"Nettie," said Travis, seriously, "do you know I am innocent of the crime I was charged with after leaving here?"

"Know it? Why, of course I do."

"Who told you?"

"Why, you goose, *love* told me."

"When?"

"When they first said you did it."

"Do you mean to say that during all this time you have believed me to be innocent?"

"I mean to say that during all this time I *knew* you to be."

"I wrote your father, telling him all; did he not—"

"Yes, he did show me the letter, but I knew you told the truth, and that made it impossible for you to have done what you thought you did."

"How so?" he asked, as he advanced and put his arm around her waist.

"Why, you said you supposed the fall against the safe caused Mr. Ward's death."

"Yes."

"Well, everybody knew that couldn't have been, and papa himself said so, and the conclusion they came to was that you had a weapon of some kind in your hand."

"They did?"

"Yes. But I knew you were no coward, and that you had no weapon—so of course you were not the guilty one."

Jo looked lovingly into the sweet face nestling on his shoulder, and he pressed the gentle form closer to him and imprinted a kiss upon her lips.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "how sweet, noble and precious is the love that told you in one day what it has taken me all these years to find out."

"Lor' bress my po' ole black soul if dis yer ain't Mars' Jo! When you git back, Mars' Jo?" And old Nathan made his appearance on the interesting

scene, and held out his black, bony hand, which Jo shook heartily.

"I've just arrived, Nathan; how well you do look—I'm glad to see you keeping your age so well."

"Reckon yo'd a been a heap gladder if I'd-a held back a little—he! he! I knowed 'twas you afo' I saw yer. Miss Nettie doan lub nobody else dat much."

Nettie hurriedly bade Jo stay to breakfast and tripped into the house, her young heart much lighter than it had been for many a day.

Jo sent Nathan to the hotel whence he soon returned with Jack Davis, and in a few minutes the merriest party that had ever assembled under that roof, was seated at the Professor's breakfast table.

Mrs. Matthews had aged but little, and as she occupied her accustomed place at the foot of the table, Jo could not keep his eyes from her good, kind face, nor help admiring the loving, motherly expression that sat thereon.

Nettie also had her old seat opposite Jo, and the happiness of her heart manifested itself in her expressive eyes as she looked at him and thought that the light had now broken through the clouds and all was well.

Aunt Becky Stubbs was resplendent in a gaily colored dress set off with ribbons and bows to cover the sharp angles of her attenuated form; a dark, false "bang" to hide her gray hair, sat crooked on her forehead, while a little rouge and a generous bestowal of lily white, served to fill up the wrinkles of her sharp, smirking visage.

"Land's sakes alive!" she exclaimed, looking at Davis after all were seated, "Air you 'way from Texas?"

"I *air*," replied Jack, with a grin.

"And you never got sculped nor nothin'?"

"Never sculped."

"Then I don't believe the Injuns are as bad there as they make out," she remarked, and forthwith dropped that subject for one she understood better.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A VOICE FROM SAM.

After breakfast the Professor, Jo and Jack left the house and proceeded to the office of the prosecuting attorney, Major Keene. The Major was found in his office, and after a few preliminaries, Jack Davis laid before him all the evidence he had been able to procure, and which, he assured the Major, could be fully substantiated on oath. He had everything noted down in a memorandum-book, which he produced and read as follows:

1st. Jo Travis left Ardrey going east 11 p. m., June 13th, 187—.

2d. Mrs. Buskin passed through Ardrey about twelve o'clock (midnight) June 13th, 187—. She saw at least two people at the depot then.

3d. Mr. Buskin left her at the house of a friend while he left, saying he was going to the depot; he returned after two hours' absence accompanied by two other men.

4th. After leaving the house, and on their way to Spankton, one of the men, Carter by name, left the party about half a mile from town and rode back. Nothing was seen of him until after breakfast in Spankton the next morning.

5th. Nathan Jones found Ward's watch in the office the day after the murder and gave it to Sam Simpson.

6th. Walter Wolcott, at the time of the murder, operator at Hydefield, will testify that train No. 2, on June 13, 187—, had passed Hydefield when he was requested by John Crawford to send a telegram to Jacob Matthews, at Ardrey, to intercept Mr. Buskin. He called Ardrey, was answered, but had sent no further than the address when Ardrey broke, saying he would take nothing for old Matthews. Mr. Wolcott was very familiar with Pete Carter's writing on the line, and will swear that it was Carter at the key in Ardrey.

7th. Records in train despatcher's office at Darden show No. 2 to have been on time at Hydefield on the night in question.

Jack turned the book over to Major Keene and took his seat.

The Major knit his brows, examined the entries, and finally remarked:

"I will make a few inquiries and let you know the result in a day or two; meanwhile, Mr. Travis will be at liberty on his own recognizance."

Ten days thereafter the Major notified Jo that not a particle of evidence could be found against him and he had quashed the indictment.

There was no doubt, he said, but that Pete Carter was the murderer of Ward, and he would take steps to get him from the United States authorities.

Jo was happy—so was Jack. The latter celebrated his victory in the usual manner, and if the charming Mrs. Buskin had not made her appearance at Ardrey

just about that time, there is no telling how long the celebration would have continued; she, however, smiled sweetly upon the convivial young man, and by her gentle influence induced him to "swear off" until Christmas. Everything was now going on smoothly at Ardrey, and if the mystery of the watch could be cleared up, Jo would have asked for nothing more.

Christmas came, and as it brought Jack nothing but joy, he was perfectly willing to renew his vow, for the widow's sake, and "swear off" for a year. To Jo, Christmas brought a letter from the erratic Sam, which the suddenly enriched operator had written while reveling in the thought that he was no longer a pauper. It was as follows:

+ MILLWOOD, TEXAS, December 20, 187—

OLD PARD—I've scooped the reward—am heeled now. I enclose M. O. for $35—$20 of which is the amount you gave me when you left here; $15 is to pay Mac for a watch I soaked with him when I relieved you at Ardrey. I don't want the blamed watch—you can have it; I also enclose Mac's receipt for watch. I'm all straight—nary drop. Hope you are all O. K. Love to Jack. Thine, SAM.

*7 q.

Jo looked at the card which accompanied the letter, and found it to be that of George McConnell, a man who formerly kept a saloon in Ardrey. Turning the card over, he read the following:

* "7 q."—Understood by operators to mean "73," indicating "compliments," etc.

ARDREY, June 14, 187—

Received of Sam Simpson one gold hunting case watch, No. 15,432, with initials J. P. W. on inside of case, as security for fifteen dollars loaned by me to Simpson. GEO. MCCONNELL.

"That's all right," said Davis, when Jo had shown him the above. "That was Ward's watch; let's find McConnell and see what became of it."

Jo and his friend started out and found Mr. McConnell at his large wholesale liquor establishment.

Jack got down to business at once.

"Mr. McConnell," said he, handing him the old receipt, "I would like to redeem this watch now."

McConnell took the receipt, and adjusting his spectacles, looked at it critically.

"Are you Sam Simpson?" he finally asked.

"That's who I am," replied Jack, promptly. "Where's the watch?"

"I should never have known you—but to tell the truth, Sam, as you didn't call for it, and I didn't suppose you ever would, I sold it."

"Who to?"

"To Will Newins."

"All right; thank you," and Jack and his friend left.

"You don't mind stretching the truth a little, Jack," remarked Travis.

"Oh, that's perfectly legitimate; he wouldn't have told any one but Sam. Newins played that pretty fine, didn't he?"

"Yes; what do you suppose his object was?"

"I'll tell you; he saw that a certain young lady didn't take much stock in your knocking Ward out of the way, so he wanted to make you out a thief; he had a hankering after the same party, you know."

"Where can I find him, Jack?"

"Who, Newins? Why, you'll find him at the Falls; he went back there when I told him you were coming."

"I must see him."

"What for? Is he such a dear friend?"

"No, Jack; but depend upon it, he knows more than he told at the inquest, and he kept it to himself to injure me; I never would have thought it, but this watch transaction has opened my eyes."

"You're right, to a dead moral certainty. Now, when do you want to go to the Falls?"

"Next train."

"That leaves in an hour. I'll go along to see fair play."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A NORTHER.

About the first thing people do when they conclude to build a railroad town is to organize a lumber yard, open a saloon and elect a mayor, city council and marshal, and lay back for trade. This was about the extent of Doolittle, on the Texas & Pacific Railroad at the time of Sam Simpson's leaving Millwood. The council proceedings were held in the rear of the only store in town, where waterworks, gas companies, factories, street improvements and such enterprises were talked of, and so far as resolutions were concerned, were completed and in active operation. The marshal sat by the stove of the only saloon, or displayed his gorgeous badge and navy-six on the depot platform at train time. They had no calaboose to accommodate prisoners, so when some luckless wight was found drunk contrary to good order and the peace and dignity of the State of Texas, he was caught and placed in a freight-car, as one usually stood on the siding.

Into this prison, one calm January night, was boosted a tramp who had been found asleep in the mayor's corn-crib. He did not appear to object to

his incarceration, for in a most voluble style he detailed some of his exploits in "Frisco" when he had been sent down the slope to work the golden end of the overland wire; how Salt Lake had roasted him with "A. U. B.," but he took it all with "nary bust," and how he got back at 'em with "China steamer biz," and made 'em sick.

His language was entirely meaningless to his auditors, and no one knew or understood him. The door of the car was pulled to, locked, and with a "g'night, ole pard," the prisoner rolled over to sleep.

The night, though in January, was spring-like; one of those winter nights that are oppressively warm and close, and which, on the prairies of Texas, denote a change in the weather.

Towards midnight the change came. The northern sky grew dark, the air was almost stifling; a sullen roar, and speedily the "swish" of the wind was heard as it came driving down over the bleak plains; a light breeze at first, it increased every moment in velocity until in an hour a terrific norther was howling frightfully over the prairies, scattering its chilling blasts far and wide, each succeeding gust blowing colder and more furiously than its predecessor. Heaven pity the hapless wretch who is denied the snug comfort of a warm bed or the genial glow of a roaring fire on such a night!

Train No. 12 left the end of the division light, with orders to pick up all empties on the way and set them out at stations where needed. Thus the car containing our prisoner was carried on to the next station, run in on the siding and left.

When the station porter opened this car the next day, he was nearly overcome with fright at the sight which met his gaze; for there, in one corner, was the cold and stark body of the unfortunate prisoner, his hands beaten to a shapeless mass caused by his frantic efforts to attract the attention of the train hands. The agent, an old operator, was quickly summoned, and upon entering the car recognized the body at once.

"Poor, wayward Sam!" he exclaimed, while his voice trembled and a tear fell from his eye. "He has been side-tracked for the last time."

Thus perished the free-hearted, good-natured, but misguided Sam Simpson, whose hand was always raised against himself but never against another; whose only fault was so strongly developed, that it prevented his better nature from coming to the surface, and kept him from being a light in his profession and an ornament to society.

Let the mantle of charity be thrown over his sins, and let us hope that when he "cut in" on the eternal line he heard a "call" that he was glad to answer.

CHAPTER XXV.

ALL CLEAR.

It did not require a very long time after the train reached Elk Falls for the young men to find Will Newins. Jack knew his haunts, and in a short while found him in a rear room of a saloon busily engaged in a game of "auction pitch" with several of his friends.

Grubbs was dealing, while Newins sat with a woe-begone look on his face, gazing at the chalk marks on the table before him, which indicated he was three "in the ring."

The cards dealt, all the players picked up their hands and examined them closely.

"Give you one, Will," said the first bidder, who had only one "to go."

"I'll bid two," said another.

"I'll give you three, and put you outside the ring," said a third.

"If you can't do any better'n that, I'll play my hand," remarked Will, looking anxiously at the man whose turn it was to bid next.

"Guess I'll play my hand first, gentlemen," quietly observed Jo Travis, as he entered the apartment followed by Jack.

The whole party looked up, and Newins, recognizing Jo, was seized with a fit of trembling, while the cards dropped from his nerveless hand and fell upon the floor.

"Jo Travis!" he exclaimed, his craven heart throbbing with fear and his guilty face blanching in terror.

"Yes, Will Newins, I am Jo Travis, and I have come here to settle a score with you."

Grubbs arose, followed by the others of the party, and looked menacingly towards Jo. Newins gathered courage from the attitude of his friends and his right hand made a quick movement in the direction of his hip pocket.

Instantly he was felled by a blow from Jo, while Jack quickly produced a pistol and pointed it at the others, warning them not to make a move.

"I knew the crowd we had to tackle," he said, "and I fixed myself; now, gentlemen, take a back seat while Mr. Travis interviews this red-headed dude."

The men stood back and Grubbs assisted Newins, whose face looked like it had been kicked by a mule, to rise.

"You're slightly disfigured, but still in the ring, Will," said Jack. "It'll take more than three to get you out now."

"Newins," said Jo, as his quondam friend wiped the blood from his face with a handkerchief, "I have learned that you placed a watch in a valise that I left at Norvelle, to make it appear that I had stolen

it. I think your reason for doing this was to injure me in a certain person's estimation."

"Well, Jo," whined Newins, "I thought——"

"Never mind what you thought," interrupted Travis. "You own you did it?"

"Yes, but——"

"Never mind any explanations; I know why you did it, and I suppose the same reason prompted you to keep to yourself what you saw at the depot that night after I left?"

Newins looked up in astonishment.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Just this; you know that you saw Ward alive after I left, but you said nothing about it, as you wanted it to appear that I killed him. We have proof that Carter was the man who did it, and it will do no good for you to keep what you know, any longer."

Newins drew a long sigh and leaned against the table for support.

"Well, Jo Travis," he said, huskily, "I'll own up—I saw that man hit Ward with a slung-shot two or three hours after you left. I went to the store after you had gone, but before going to bed, thought I would go over to the depot and see if Ward was hurt any. I may as well confess it—I thought if he was, that I would get him to arrest you; just before I reached the depot a man rode up, got down off his horse and went in there; as I came near the window I looked in and saw Ward sitting in a chair, facing me. The man came in the door, said a few words to

Ward, who hardly noticed him; the man then gave Ward a terrific lick with a slung-shot, and he fell over on the floor. I was completely scared and ran home."

"And you kept this all to yourself; you who pretended to be my friend."

Newins leaned over toward Jo and whispered in his ear:

"Forgive me, Jo, I wanted *her*."

Travis gave him a withering look and motioning Davis to follow, left the room.

Jack took a half-dollar from his pocket and handed it to Newins, who took it mechanically.

"Here's a half a dollar, Will," he said; "take it and buy a piece of rope with it and go and hang yourself. Good-bye," he added as he left the room; "I'll leave an order for the undertaker as I go by there."

* * * * * * * *

Six months have elapsed and night has cast its sable mantle over the city of Ardrey. The spacious parlors of Professor Matthews are in a splendid blaze of light, the occasion being the double wedding of Jo Travis and Nettie Matthews, and Jack Davis and the widow Buskin. A happy and joyous throng is seated at the Professor's hospitable table, which is groaning beneath the weight of choice viands and costly delicacies.

Aunt Becky is in her glory, albeit she now and then gives a sigh as she thinks of the faithless Smoother and the fickleness of men generally.

After the hum of merry voices had filled the room for half an hour, the Professor arose in his place at the head of the table and toasted the newly wedded couples, and improved the opportunity by giving them some sound advice, saying in conclusion:

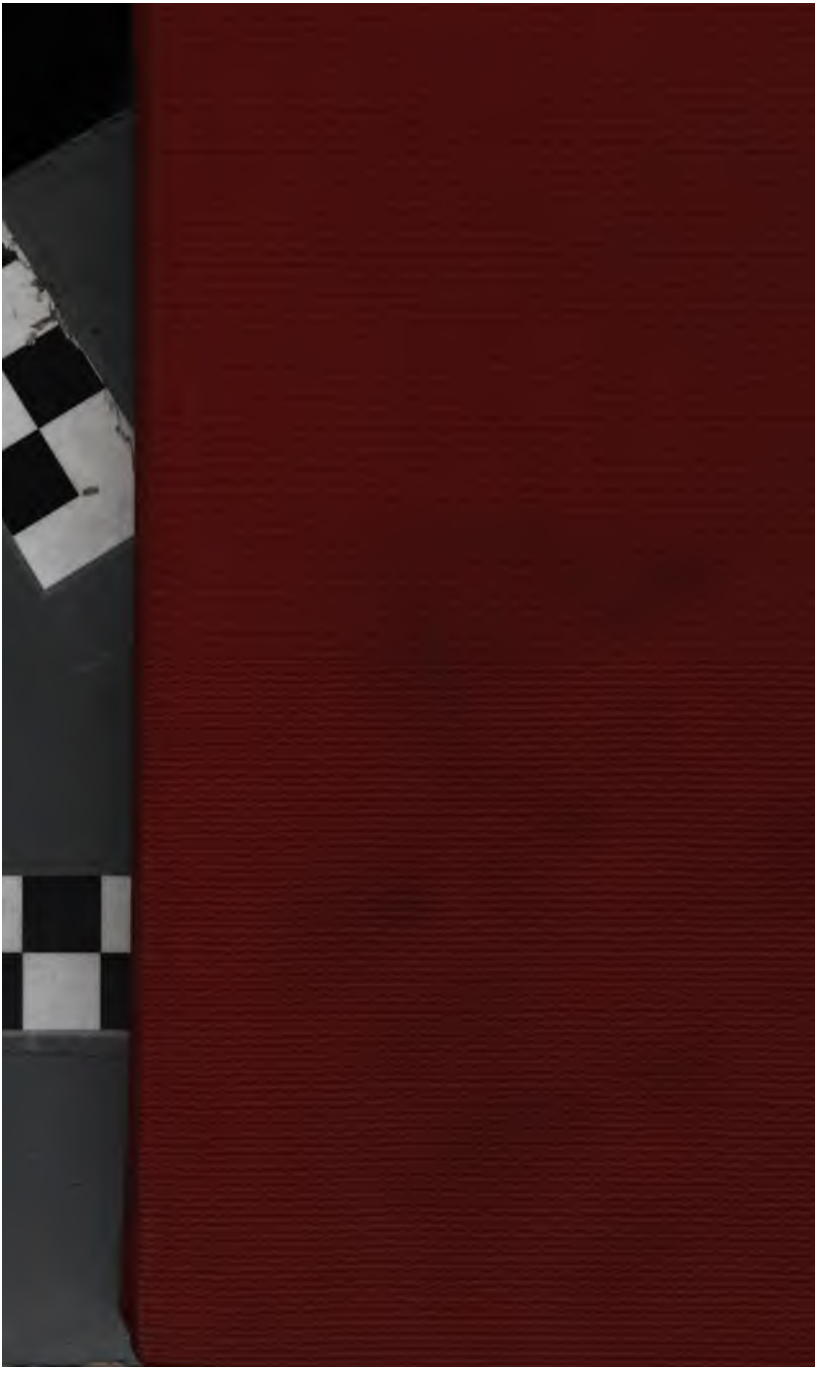
"Never be faint-hearted over troubles; set your face against misfortune and go ahead. In fact—

Always keep a stout heart and a——"

The old man's voice faltered, and he was so overcome with emotion that he was obliged to sit down.

Jack at once sprang to his feet.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, smiling over the length of the table. "Our venerable friend, being quite overcome, has forgotten his couplet; as I catch on to his idea, I must ask to be allowed to finish it for him:

Always keep a stout heart and a stiff upper lip;
Stand up to the racket and don't lose your grip."

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